

car

OCTOBER
2015
ISSUE 639
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WORLD EXCLUSIVE

McLAREN TO BUILD NEW BMW SUPERCAR

THEY CO-CREATED F1. THEY'RE AT IT AGAIN

GIANT TEST

MX-5's day of destiny

Mazda battles Toyota GT86 and Audi TT roadster

INSIDE

The Bentley SUV's lair

180mph Bentayga redefines SUV:
Sumptuous Unrestrained Vehicle

ADVENTURE

Leaving Le Mans

We fire up McLaren's 650S LM.
How far can we go in 24 hours?

HOT MINI SHOWDOWN

JCW! VXR! ST!

Terrible Scrabble hand,
amazing hot hatches

Exclusive
first ride

911 goes turbo



NEW vs USED

£40k used
911 or new
TT S?

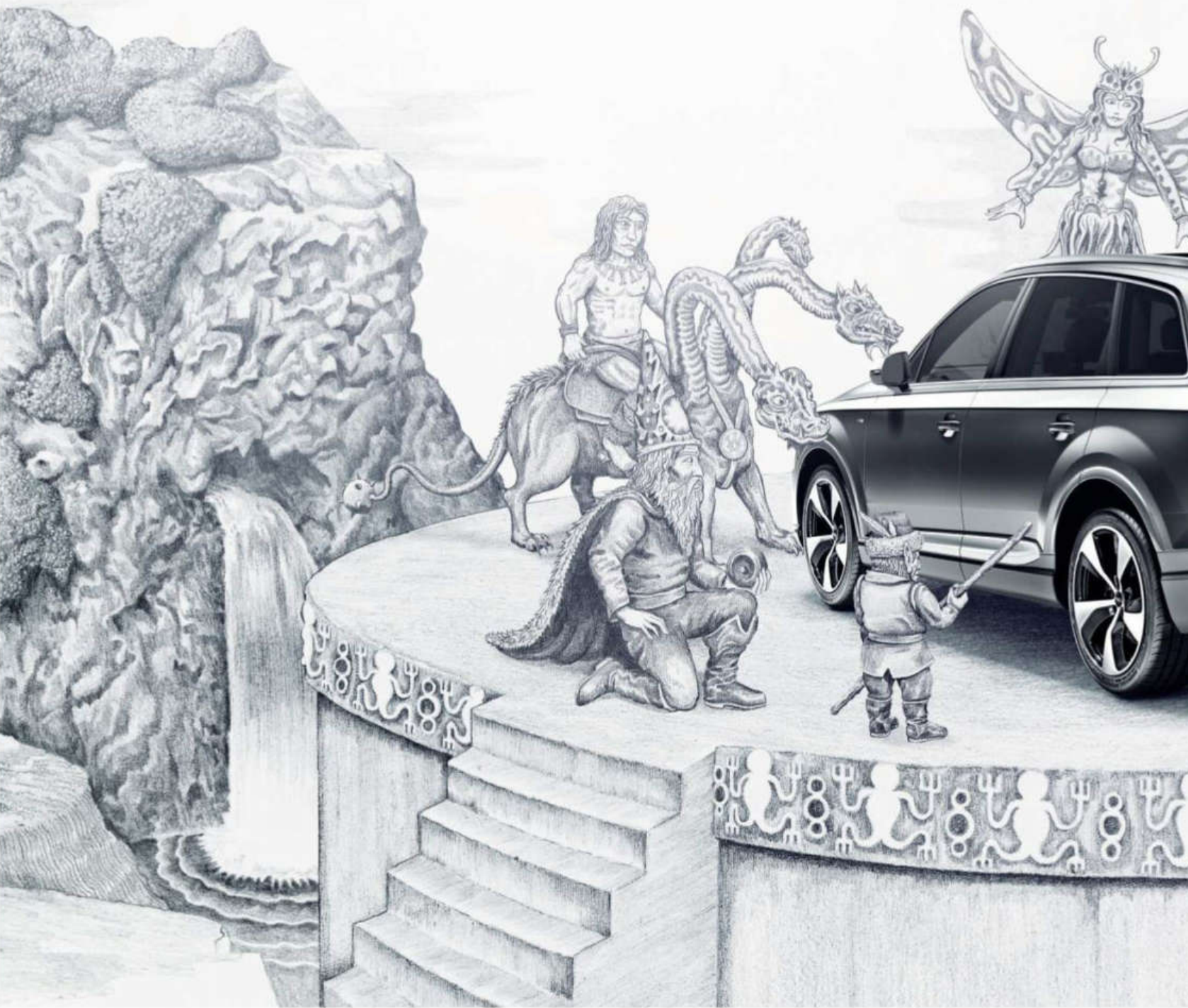
It's the biggest 911 shake-up for 18 years.

We're strapped in. Has Porsche blown it?



THE SEVEN KINGDOMS RECONCILED

INSIDE THE SEVEN SEATS OF THE AUDI Q7



The all-new Audi Q7 with seven seats. The Legend continues.
Discover more, search 'Legend'

Official fuel consumption figures for the Q7 range in mpg (l/100km) from: Urban 42.2 (6.7) – 44.8 (6.3),
Standard EU test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. Range of figures stated reflect optional downgrade from the standard 19" alloy wheel



Audi
Vorsprung durch Technik



Extra Urban 47.1 (6.0) – 53.3 (5.3), Combined 45.6 (6.2) – 49.6 (5.7), CO₂ emissions 163 – 148g/km. to 18" wheel. Other optional wheels may also affect emissions and fuel consumption figures. Image shown features optional alloy wheels. Car used for illustrative purposes only.



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car

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BMW 7-series: driving the upper-class revolutionary



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Official Fuel Economy Figures for the new MINI Clubman Range: Urban 35.8-60.1 mpg (8-4.7 l/100km). Extra Urban 52.3-76.3 mpg (5.4-3.7 l/100km). Combined 44.8-68.9 mpg (6.3-4.1 l/100km). CO₂ Emissions 147-109 g/km. Figures may vary depending on driving style and conditions.

WELCOME.

The rise and rise of McLaren



CAR MAGAZINE'S relationship with McLaren Automotive has been, at times, rocky. Our scoops revealing the 12C and Spider caused shockwaves at the top of the company. And our 2011 cover line 'McLaren's Worst Nightmare' after the 12C's hydraulically interconnected dampers sprang a leak and the car flopped on track, before losing to Ferrari in our crunch giant test, landed us on one former executive's enemies' list. That's the price for telling it how it is, which we pride ourselves on doing at CAR.

McLaren has come a long way since then, at a speed reflective of its supercar stable. In four years the company has re-designed the 12C to create the 650S, then changed a third of its parts to create the circuit-crushing 675 LT. That version is 100kg lighter, has a re-engineered engine that revs higher and delivers more power, and some wild aero that clamps the LT to the tarmac. Chris Chilton drives the 675 LT in this issue, while Ben Miller tests the 650S LM special edition – and himself – by choosing to spend the Le Mans 24-hour race period covering as many miles as possible in a loop away from, and back to, that famous track.

Regular readers will know that Martin Brundle experienced the P1 GTR for us last month, and was blown away by the hybrid supercar's incredible acceleration, linear steering and brakes, and its consistency, lap after lap. The P1 can undeniably mix it with Porsche's 918 Spyder and LaFerrari, the greatest supercars from companies with six decades of uninterrupted road car experience. That's some achievement for a start-up.

Just 300 of McLaren Automotive's 1000 employees are engineers, with another 400 working on the flexible production line. Early build of the third car line – the Sports Series – is underway; we'll drive the 570S next month. With that model in production, McLaren will achieve the goal it set out in 2009: to launch a three-tier product range. Along the way the company became profitable in 2013, then banking £15m before tax on £475m turnover last year, when it delivered 1649 cars. In 2016,

McLaren will invest another £120m in product development, aiming to sell 2000 cars, a figure it hopes to double in 2017. That will be Mission Accomplished.

Last week, McLaren's progress was brought home to me during an extended drive in a 650S. We often use the language of war – explosions, violence, savagery – to describe a supercar's performance and character. But that wouldn't reflect the civility of the ride, the easy view out, the deftness of the steering, the delicacy of the bespoke controls. Yes, it is shocking – and exhilarating – how quickly the 650S eats up the road ahead. But there's so much more to its abilities than mere firepower. The 650S is mind-blowing. And given our previous McLaren criticism, there's extra meaning in those sincere words of praise.

This editorial has reflected on six years of CAR's McLaren coverage, but we have another 47 years of pioneering writing in our archive. Starting this month, we will begin to unearth our greatest features in a special website area, called CAR+. For a small fee, not only will you be able to read some of the incredible stories that made the CAR legend, but you'll also get access to CAR's print content digitally whenever you're online. To find out more, please visit carmagazine.co.uk.

PHIL McNAMARA
Editor

While the rest of them were lapping Le Mans, we cleared off for a 24-hour charge in McLaren's sublime 650S LM



Cover photography
John Wycherley

**THIS MONTH
IN HISTORY:
OCTOBER
1997**



NEW PORSCHE 911

Porsche's current plan to turbocharge the entire 911 range echoes history: in October 1997 CAR featured the 911 996, which replaced the air-cooled flat-six with an all-new water-cooled boxer. Then, as now, the aim was greater efficiency – the increased performance coming as a bonus. Yet it was the performance that ended up winning us over. History repeating?

We ride in the new 911 – p64

ALSO IN THAT ISSUE...

New Mk4 Golf GTI leaves Paul Horrell wanting more: 'it's no longer really a GTI' Russell Bulgin follows MG to the Bonneville Salt Flats to see an MG-F crack 215mph 'Fiercely fast' Jaguar XJR giant tested against Audi S8 'mega-cruiser' and 'flamboyant but flawed' Maserati Quattroporte – guess which wins...

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Official fuel consumption for the Volvo XC60 D4 SE (manual) in MPG (l/100km): Urban 57.6 (4.9), Extra Urban 67.3 (4.2), Combined 62.8 (4.5). CO2 Emissions 117g/km. MPG figures are obtained from laboratory testing intended for comparisons between vehicles and may not reflect real driving results.



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INSIDER.

Cars, people, scoops, motorsport, analysis: the month according to *CAR*

Woking wonder-tub
McLaren has to-die-for carbonfibre monocoque expertise, and BMW wants in, to ensure brilliance and cut costs. Unique calibration will distance the two firms' supercars

Powered by M
Engine is likely to be a big-capacity V8 with forced induction but it'll hail from Munich, not Woking. Four turbochargers will ensure searing performance – expect 750bhp



Sensation! McLaren to build **BMW** supercar

Last time they got it on, out popped the McLaren F1.

Now Woking and Munich are at it again, with a quad-turbo V8 antidote to the rainforest-saving i8

By Georg Kacher



BMW IS DEVELOPING a mid-engined supercar with a V8 engine – and is in talks with McLaren to put the car into production. CAR can reveal that the top secret flagship is scheduled for a Frankfurt show unveiling in exactly two years' time, if talks with Britain's supercar specialists are successfully concluded.

Munich has been toying with a high-octane yin to the i8 hybrid's yang for a few years. But with 2015 bringing a new chairman, Harald Krüger, and a new boss at M Division, Frank van Meel, the idea of a BMW supercar once again has real momentum at the very top.

Another new boy, r&d chief Klaus Fröhlich, started exploratory talks with McLaren back in January. An alliance makes perfect sense. BMW – still digesting the telephone numbers investment it took to bring the i3 and i8 to market – is understandably keen to seek a top-notch supercar partner with whom to share development, rather than give M Division carte blanche on costs and strategy.

The supercar is scheduled to be in dealerships for 2019; a coupe is top priority, with a roadster a strong possibility. The models would be twinned with the carbonfibre monocoque of McLaren's P16, the codename for the next-generation 650S.

The two companies have previous, of course (see panel overleaf). BMW supplied the McLaren F1's magnificent V12, and the Germans would again provide a powerplant to call a McLaren-developed rolling chassis home. Sources say BMW has plumped for its new 4.0-litre V8 rather than with a highly tuned six. Output would be boosted by no fewer than four chargers; two exhaust-driven, two powered by electric motors. This state-of-the-art engine would be good for 750bhp, and more besides. Since the V8 is not a McLaren engine, there should be no brand image conflict – though Woking might balk at BMW embarrassing it in the power stakes.

Differentiated exterior designs would separate the two supercars. With start of production pencilled in for late 2018, there's just about time to accommodate BMW's needs within the P16's architecture. Done right, the matrix should be sufficiently modular to cater for brand-specific hang-on panels, door treatments and aero concepts. BMW's wishlist also includes a bespoke instrument panel, as well as infotainment, connectivity and driver assistance features it would share with McLaren, if so desired. BMW is not looking for an overly ambitious volume: three digits will suffice each year.

Insiders claim a plug-in hybrid is not on the agenda. Mid-term, anything is possible, but for 2018 expect start/stop, brake energy regeneration and at best a mild 15kW hybrid boost.

Suspension, steering and brakes will be shared across both brands: BMW should be able to dial in its own specific calibration, with a high-speed bias for that coveted autobahn touch. BMW's still nameless two-seater would, like the 650S, be positioned in Ferrari, Lamborghini and Aston Martin territory. The pricing would have to be beyond £150,000. After all, the deal would also need to be a solid money-maker for the Brits, who are still digesting a substantial up-front investment.

There remains a big question: why doesn't BMW handle its proposed halo car in-house? That was the original plan for M100, a supercar intended to crown the marque's 2016 centenary. Even though it was already well underway, then-chairman Norbert Reithofer called it off at the eleventh hour. As ▶

the driving force behind the i3 and i8, Reithofer feared the M100 would hamper BMW's eco-focused sub-brand, which cost billions to establish. But it's now thought a big-bore V8 supercar could co-exist with the low carbon i8, with its zero-emissions electric capability and 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbo.

The mid-engined M100, which found a strong advocate in design overlord Adrian van Hooydonk, was a striking piece of kit: wide, low, aggressive, very much a BMW and with innovative aerodynamics. By selectively directing the airflow through a front end scoop to a set of horizontal bonnet louvres below the windscreen, and from there over the roof and through ducts around the drivetrain, the wind tunnel wizards achieved a magnetic ground effect while reducing drag to the equivalent of an extra 100bhp at speed. In combination with a lightweight body and an awesome 750bhp twin-turbo V8, M100 would have given the supercar superstars a run for their money, on road and on track. But Reithofer gave the thumbs down, and the full-scale M100 disappeared.

M Division didn't take no for an answer. Instead, they began tweaking the concept, suggested additional electric front-wheel drive and replacing the V8 with a slimmer straight-six, but to no avail. In a final desperate attempt to make the chairman change his mind, the Garching skunkworks prepared the i8 CSi (CAR, December 2014), which was in essence a rebodied and heavily reworked i8. The car did keep its trademark carbon core, but it would have needed more power and redesigned suspension for better grip and handling. The development team dabbled with four- and six-cylinder engines, and upgraded the electric motors, targeting 750bhp. The additional batteries and the more complex propulsion system brought tricky weight, cost and packaging implications. Reithofer killed the compromised concept once and for all, for failing to improve on i8 or offer something compellingly different.

The passion to do a pure supercar burns brightly within BMW's new chiefs



When BMW met McLaren the first time


INSIDE THE seminal McLaren F1 beats a BMW heart that's arguably the greatest naturally aspirated road car engine – ever. Yet it came about almost by accident, provoked by an encounter between Gordon Murray and BMW Motorsport chief engineer Paul Rosche at the 1990 Hockenheim Grand Prix. Murray knew Rosche from the old Brabham-BMW days, but it was the German who suggested BMW could build the F1's motor. The result was the extraordinary S70/2 V12.

McLaren wanted 5.3-litres but got

6.1 – within the 600mm packaging constraints – and the 550bhp target became a 627bhp reality, enough to achieve 550bhp per tonne.

Innovations included scant 3mm cylinder separation, expensive Inconel manifolds, dual injection and binning the flywheel. The silencer doubled as the rear crash structure. Whatever the engine, the F1 was always going to be legendary, but BMW power helped deliver immense, record-setting performance. When BMW and McLaren got together, magic happens.

But the passion to do a pure supercar, with an external partner to share the burden, burns brightly within the new chiefs. And throughout the year, car spotters loitering at the Munich factory gates have noticed a growing number of visitors, coming and going in current McLaren coupes and spiders. McLaren's official line is that its automotive line has a ceiling of 5000 units a year. 'We can't build cars for anyone else, with 4000 McLarens the target by 2017,' said a spokesman. But with its low-volume expectations, that leaves some headroom that BMW could exploit. Assuming McLaren, which is already profitable at 1500 units, deems the project worthwhile.

At this stage the plan is not cast in stone: it may still come to nothing. But according to sources within BMW's research and development complex, the odds are very much in favour of a thumbs up. After all, this tie-up has all the elements of a clever game plan – low risk, substantial customer benefit, great brand support and ultimately two fatter bottom lines. Like G29, the Z4/Supra sports car joint-venture signed with Toyota, the successor to M100 may pave the way for another partnership with McLaren. And BMW's portfolio may end up with a new halo car, i8's evil twin. 

IMAGES: ANDREI AVANARI



BMW panels on a McLaren-developed tub would ensure clear differentiation



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In the moment

Riding with a happy Kimi Räikkönen

F1's monosyllabic Finn gives **CAR's Tom Clarkson** his first interview after re-signing with Ferrari for 2016

01

'Next season will be better'

My new deal doesn't change much. I've known about me staying with Ferrari for some time and the aim is to do well in the second half of 2015 and even better next year. I'm pretty sure we're going to make a good car for next season and the aim will be to win races.

02

'I know I can still win F1 races'

I still have the speed; the reason I haven't had great results this year is because I haven't put it all together, for various reasons. If I were way off then it would be time to go. But that's not the case. I'm learning from the bad races and I'm going to make things better.

03

'Seb and I want the same thing'

There was one race this year when I was a bit lost with regards set-up, so I adopted more or less what Seb [Vettel] had on his car. It worked out fine because our cars are set-up very similarly. That's good for the team because we can go in one direction with the development...

04

'I've got a great boss'

I've known Maurizio [Arrivabene] for a long time and we get on well. He's very straightforward, but I haven't seen him when he's angry and I know he can be hard when something isn't as he wants it! He's the right guy for Ferrari because he knows the team and the sport well.

05

'There could have been another title'

I led a lot of races in 2005, but retired from many of them. With fewer problems, I might have won that title. And there was 2003, when I lost the title by two points. I probably didn't deserve that one – I only won one race and Michael [Schumacher] won most of them.

06

'The Ferrari FF is a nice motor'

The Ferrari FF is a good car – as you can see, Tom! They give me one to use when I'm in Switzerland and it's great. If you have a family, there's space for luggage and all the things that come with having children. If I were buying a Ferrari, I'd probably buy one of these.

NEW CAR DEBRIEF > LAMBORGHINI HURACAN SPYDER

1 Hold on to your hat – sure as night follows day, and a hangover follows a really decent night, there's now a Huracan Spyder following the Huracan coupe. A 602bhp 5.2-litre naturally-aspirated V10 and a retractable roof? That ought to clear your head. Quickly.

2 Fabric attraction – unlike certain rivals we could mention *cough* Ferrari and McLaren *cough* Lambo has stuck with a simple fabric roof rather than fit a fancy folding hardtop. This keeps the weight down, but it's still 100kg heavier than the coupe.

3 Fast enough? – 15 seconds to stow the Lambo's roof seems strong, until you learn the 488 Spider only needs 14. Plus the Ferrari's 3.0sec 0-62mph smashes the Huracan's 3.5 (also some 0.3sec slower than the coupe). But still: no turbos and a V10.

4 Bring the noise – you can drop the top at up to 30mph, and the rear window can be lowered independently, guaranteeing aural pleasure. With all-wheel drive and a 202mph+ top speed, it's yours from £205,400 in spring 2016.



F-Pace in Jaguar's own words

Director of design Ian Callum and vehicle line director Kevin Stride talk you around Jaguar's production-ready brave new world. **By Ben Miller**

A Jaguar to drive

'You'll recognise the XF in the way the F-Pace drives – you won't need a DNA test to know it's a Jaguar,' says design director Ian Callum. 'It's great to drive and the ride quality is good even on the 22-inch forged wheels, helped by the relatively generous sidewalls of the 265/40 R22 tyres.'

'The F-Pace's wheelbase [2874mm] and track dimensions are unique, and that's down to the difference between a platform and an architecture. Ours is a chassis architecture, conceived with F-Pace in mind, so there's no compromise,' explains Kevin Stride. 'Front suspension is double wishbone and the rear is integral multi-link, a development of XF's multi-link.'

Space – Jaguar's new frontier

'This car was a challenge,' admits Callum. 'In some ways an SUV goes against Jaguar's natural state of long, low and sleek. It came together when we referenced some F-type design cues, and when we focused on designing a Jaguar SUV, and not trying to push an SUV into a traditional Jaguar shape.'

'In size it sits between Audi's Q5 and Q7. It doesn't feel as big as Q7 to drive. That was important because for many this will be an urban car. Inside there's a remarkable amount of space – room for five and a 650-litre boot. We discussed a seven-seater but discounted it quickly. Visually they tend to be heavy at the tail end, and you'd have to grow the wheelbase; not very Jaguar.'

Lord and master

'There's a real sense of light and space to the interior, with great visibility,' says Callum. 'We've retained the chicane element to the doors from C-X17 concept, with strong door-pulls, and there are lots of clever, integrated storage compartments. Touches, like the parcel shelf you can fold and stow beneath the boot floor, matter on a car like this.'

Standard infotainment system is InControl Touch, with its 8-inch touchscreen, with InControl Touch Pro and its 10.2-inch screen an option. Multi-function 12.3-inch TFT virtual instruments can replace the standard twin analogue dial set-up.



Prepare to feel tiny between the giant door pull and InControl Pro's vast screen



Power or parsimony

With first deliveries in April, the F-Pace range will be offered in four trims; Prestige (from £34,170), R-Sport (from £36,670), Portfolio (from £39,170) and range-topping S (from £51,450). The engine line-up consists of an Ingenium 2.0-litre diesel (178bhp), a 3.0-litre V6 diesel (296bhp) and a supercharged 3.0-litre V6 (375bhp, 0-62mph in 5.5sec). The V6s drive all four wheels via an eight-speed ZF auto transmission. The 2.0-litre diesel can be had in AWD form, manual or auto, or as a rear-wheel-drive manual with 129g/km of CO2 and 57.7mpg.



How to make an SUV of classic British brand DNA. Bentley, take note

The miracle of the pretty SUV

'The front end is pure Jaguar,' continues Callum. 'That in itself is interesting – we didn't have a distinctive face five years ago. Now it's established. The rear lights are essentially F-type, while the fuselage itself is relatively clean, broken up only by the swage line running back from the air vent and a strong light-catching element below it. The short overhangs and sweeping glasshouse are key, as is the

roof spoiler, which helps give the shape a sense of speed, and the curvature of the rear haunch, which is an F-type cue. I'm proud of the surfacing at the haunches. We pushed manufacturing hard here. Each side is a single sheet of aluminium – the biggest we now produce – and there's a lot going on at the back of the car. Fortunately we now know the material better than most.'



France invades Germany

Frankfurt show? Paris more like!

Peugeot, Renault, Citroën and ~~Citroën~~ DS rock up to the world's biggest motor show to take on the home teams with a two-two combo of fantasy and function



Peugeot Fractal concept

Just when you think the days of properly bonkers concepts are past, along comes Peugeot with the Fractal. Looks straightforward at first glance, but the removable roof turns this tiny 2+2 coupe into a drop-top of dimensions akin to the latest MX-5, and reveals someone really let the designers go nuts on the inside. 80% of the interior is 3D printed, enabling

'anechoic' surfacing to provide a better sound stage for the '9.1.2' hi-fi system, which features a pair of 'tactile bass' drivers that directly target your inner ear. The sat-nav speaks as if *outside* the car, there are twin touchpads on the steering wheel, and you unlock it with a Samsung smartwatch. Obviously it's all-electric – what else would it be?

NEED TO KNOW

> **Price** Not everything has one > **Engine** Twin 101bhp electric motors (one per axle), 6.8sec 0-62mph, 280-mile range > **Transmission** 2-spd, 4wd > **Aimed at** Creamfields refugees, gym bunnies and annoying the neighbours > **On sale** Never

Renault Megane five-door

64mm longer, 25mm lower and considerably wider of front (+47mm) and rear (+39mm) track, the fourth-generation Megane has the look of a mega-Clio reimagined by Tokyo. All bulging wheelarches and fantastical LED lighting arrays, it's not pretty, but it is loaded with tech. Top GT models get Renaultsport branding (well, it worked for BMW's M Sport) and four-

wheel steering – take that, *Herr Golf* – while interior appointments include a portrait-format central screen, digital instruments and head-up display. Clever aero and efficient engines offer eco-cred, too. But Renault, are you sure the world is ready for *brown* ambient illumination? And please tell us the paddleshift gearboxes have been substantially improved...

NEED TO KNOW

> **Price** From £19,000 (est) > **Engine** 99-202bhp 3- and 4-cyl petrols, 89-163bhp 4-cyl diesels > **Transmission** 6-spd manual, 6-spd auto (diesel), 7-spd auto (petrol), fwd > **Aimed at** VW Golf, hard drivers and digital natives > **On sale** Summer 2016



Citroën Cactus M

Take one regular C4 Cactus, lop the top off and send it to surf school – that's the Cactus M in a nutshell. That 'M' moniker is telling; it refers to Citroën's 1960s Méhari beach buggy, this concept's guiding light. So there's wetsuit-lairy neoprene, a hose-down interior with drainage plugs beneath the floor mats and a flop-down bootlid, Range Rover-

style, to extend the loadbay into a two-berth sleeping pod. Things take a surreal twist here – the roof includes inflatable air beams, like on upmarket tents, transforming the canvas into a makeshift shelter as you sleep inside. Citroën says this is the modern-day iteration of a 2CV or Méhari. A very Gallic lifestyle choice.

Citroën's tech future, p36

NEED TO KNOW

> **Price** Nope > **Engine** 109bhp 1.2 turbo petrol > **Transmission** 6-spd auto, fwd > **Aimed at** Surfer dudes, over-zealous jetwash owners > **Based on** Citroën C4 Cactus > **On sale** Never, in this guise. But who'd bet against a Cactus soft-top?

Citroën DS4 Crossback

If Victor Hugo designed cars, the DS4 Crossback could be his Quasimodo. This pseudo SUV is one half of Citroën's – sorry – DS's response to the *débâcle* that was the awkward original DS4, the other half being a regular hatchback. Sitting 30mm higher, the Crossback promises a more 'relaxed' drive, thanks to its longer-travel suspension.

The exterior has definitely got a bit of the hump about it from the back, but the wheelarch cladding does at least give it a definite crossover identity, while the new front-end design is sharp and distinctive. This makes it a better match to the intricate interior, which now features Apple CarPlay and a box of tech tricks including geofencing and anti-theft tracking.

NEED TO KNOW

> **Price** From £21,800 (est) > **Engine** 128bhp 1.2 3-cyl petrol, 118bhp 1.6 4-cyl diesel > **Transmission** 6-spd manual (auto option on diesel), fwd > **Aimed at** Mercedes GLA, leather fetishists and fans of classic French literature > **On sale** Nov 2015





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‘It costs as much to make a dull design as an exciting one’

Infiniti's London design chief **Simon Cox** on how to beat the Germans... by collaboration

SIMON COX is in thoughtful mood, as you'd expect from one of the more cerebral car designers. Take his breakthrough concept, the Isuzu Vehi-Cross: in 1993 Cox helped conceive a vehicle which fused a 4x4's toughness with a sports car's performance. Such 'crossovers' are utterly routine now, but it took another decade for the Infiniti FX and then the BMW X6 to make such mash-ups mainstream.

The FX – or QX70 as it's now badged – immersed Cox into his current brand, Infiniti, which he serves as director of its London design studio. 'When I worked for GM I used to travel to the US a lot, and you'd see the FX in its original burnt orange colour. Then I left, worked on the Emerg-e concept for Infiniti, and I needed a new car. So I bought an FX, put my money where the brand was, and spent five years telling people about it! It turns heads, which is what design is about, but it's a positive reaction.'

Cox joined the Infiniti payroll in 2013, when Nissan's global design boss Shiro Nakamura asked the 56-year-old to establish a European studio for the Japanese-American premium brand, next door to Nissan's London design HQ. What's his mission? 'Our role here is to give a European voice to Japan and to our studios in China and California. You can have a design studio anywhere, but it's nice to have London's cultural values – influences from museums, jewellery, sculpture, art – as well as seeing the competition's cars running around, their proportions and how they sit on the road.'

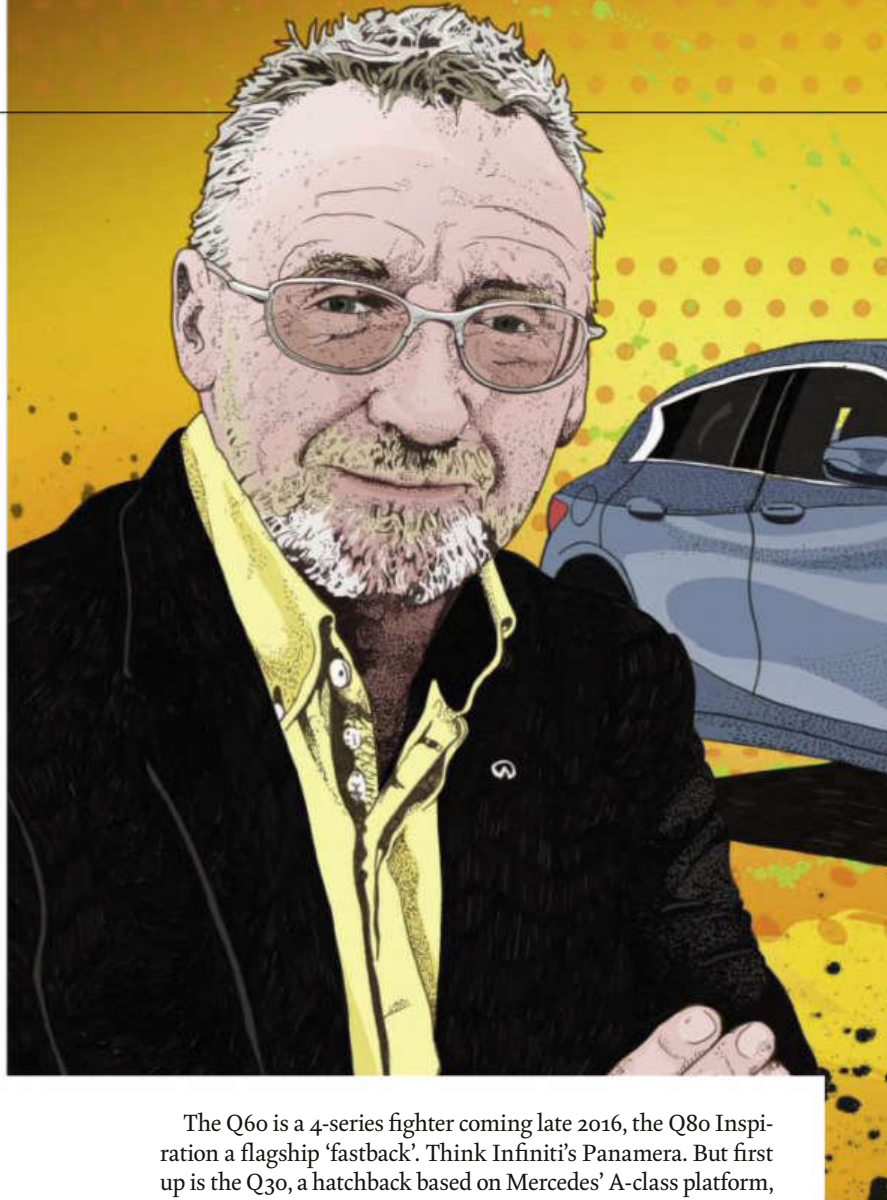
His job is to shape the concepts and production cars to evolve and grow the Infiniti brand. And it needs growing: global sales in 2014 were 186,200, just 10% of BMW's. The good news was that western European sales doubled, the bad news was to a puny 4800 cars.

Cox is used to tough gigs: as director of GM advanced design, he was a lynchpin in the multi-billion dollar revamp of Cadillac. He helped shape a series of modernist concept and production cars seemingly inspired by origami (and a stealth fighter), all flat, unadorned surfaces and crisp creases that banished Cadillac's antiquated image and continues in production 12 years on.

'We're busy establishing Infiniti's first generation of new vehicles,' he explains. 'It's a great challenge and there are frustrations. It won't happen overnight, we saw that with Cadillac. The similarities are there, except we haven't got the burden of 100 years of heritage around our neck. We've shown the Q60 and Q80 concepts: we need to get those into the marketplace and build. It's going to take 10-15 years.'



↓
Cox's mid-engined Cadillac Cien concept from 2002. He drove it round Le Mans with GM legend Bob Lutz riding shotgun



The Q60 is a 4-series fighter coming late 2016, the Q80 Inspiration a flagship 'fastback'. Think Infiniti's Panamera. But first up is the Q30, a hatchback based on Mercedes' A-class platform, which is steadily ramping up production at Nissan's Sunderland plant for deliveries in January 2016. It shares a lot with the Merc: chassis, engines, switchgear. 'That doesn't mean it's an A-class or handles like an A-class. In terms of design, it has a fresh feel, it will stand out. Inside there's a different feel too: it's asymmetric, with a premium crafted feel that makes the A-class seem basic.'

The Q30 should take Infiniti's 'double grille' and distinctive kinked rear pillar – the 'crescent curve' – to a wider audience, with its sub-£20k price tag. A jacked-up QX30 version, sharing Mercedes' GLA approach in more ways than one, also arrives in summer 2016.

'One of the key words is performance, not just dynamically but a visually sporty nature. We're not aiming to be a VW Golf. We've got to do the [quality] things equally well, but it doesn't mean you can't get some flair in there. One of the most frustrating things about this business is how much effort and energy go into making a design that answers a brief but doesn't make you stop and turn: why can't it? It takes the same amount of money to make a dull design as an exciting one.'

Cox warms to his theme, listing BMW's i8 and i3 and Tesla's Model S as recent cars that have excited him. 'They gave me a belief that car design – and by that I mean designers working with engineers and developing a vehicle – isn't dead. Was Project i a smart move from a business standpoint? Should BMW have shared the tech? To move car design on, to move the whole transport question on, companies are going to have to get together. We cannot just carry on the way we are.'

Cox signs off, leaving me with the feeling that reskinning Mercedes won't be his most inspirational Infiniti assignments...

PHIL McNAMARA @CARPhilMc

Cox with his A-class-based Infiniti Q30: 'It has a fresh feel, it will stand out, it makes the A-class seem basic'



ILLUSTRATION: MATTHEW HOLLINGS

CAR'S CURVEBALLS

6 questions only we would ask...

Tell us about your first car...

A Mini of course. My first transport was a motorbike, a Malaguti single-seater race bike which I used on the road. My first car I inherited from my family, a Mini 1000. I put on Cooper lamps straight out of *The Italian Job* and I did well over 100,000 miles in it. I ended up selling it to a design colleague who rallied it and killed it.

Which achievement makes you most proud?

I've managed to establish four different design studios in the UK, for four different companies: Lotus, Isuzu, GM and Infiniti. I've tried to recruit from the UK. I'm quite proud of that. More so than any individual car. When you're

designing products they are all important at that time. But when you've finished you've always wanted to do better! I know which achievement made my mother most proud. I was invited to Buckingham Palace for a reception with the Queen.

The best thing you've done in a car?

[Chuckles] I can't say, you couldn't write it! It involved the Mini! Seriously, it was driving the parade lap at Le Mans in the Cadillac Cien concept in 2002, with [GM product chief] Bob Lutz as my passenger.

Tell us how you screwed up?

Not getting the right work/life balance. And also having to do three degrees before deciding I wanted to be a car designer. That wasn't screwing up, it

was jewellery, fine art, sculpture, products – it all comes together in an Infiniti anyway!

Supercar or classic car?

Classic. I've got a right-hand-drive Porsche 356A, a 3.2 Carrera and a Ducati. I've always been a Porsche fan over Ferrari or Lamborghini: I love Miuras, D-types, and the odd Ferrari but there's something that Porsche represents, that I've tried to build my career on in terms of a nice shape that performs as well.

And here's your curveball: what was the second Infiniti launched, and what was it based on?

Q45 was the first. Go on, tell me.

It was the M30, a boxy coupe based on a Nissan Leopard!

I'm glad I didn't know it then, that's a positive. For me, the most iconic Infiniti is the original FX.

Connect 4

ROLLS-ROYCE CONVERTIBLES

It's a new day, it's a new Dawn... oh, good grief. Latest Rolls-Royce drop-top meets the ancestors



The brand new arrival

Dawn (2015)

We've never seen Rolls use the words 'sexiest' and 'erotic' in an official announcement before – was someone thinking of a different topless model? How excited a full four-seater super-lux convertible with 'Silent Ballet' roof mechanism gets you probably depends on your bank balance.



The modern era

Phantom Drophead Coupe (2007-present)

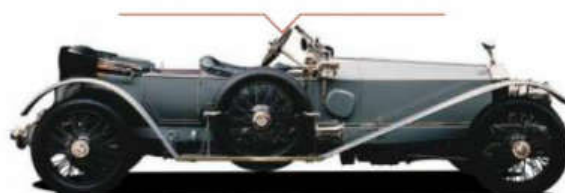
The first modern – ie, built under BMW's ownership – convertible Roller gave us boat-style rear decking, imperious presence and an immense pair of suicide doors. Range-topping pricing means the depreciation is almost as massive.



The inspiration

Silver Dawn Drophead Coupe (1950-1954)

The Silver Dawn was the first Rolls to be offered with a factory-built body, but the convertibles were all coach-built – and there were only ever 28 of them. A 1952 example by Park Ward is specifically cited as the new Dawn's inspiration.



The best car in the world

Silver Ghost (1906-1926)

It made Rolls-Royce's reputation, but Rolls actually only made the chassis. Most popular coach-built convertible was the Barker Enclosed Cabriolet, apparently. Probably also the only 'vert to share its underpinnings with an armoured car.



SEEN HERE FIRST!

What Nissan's Z-car did next

After 370Z, Japan gets to Gripz with the future of the sports car

REMEMBER THE Nissan iDX concepts from 2013? A pair of accessible rear-wheel-drive coupes so perfectly formed they spoke deeply to the petrolhead of the soul. Sadly, despite a wildly positive generation-bridging reception, there's no business case, as there aren't enough potential buyers to justify the bespoke platform required.

Since Nissan likes to think of itself as a sports car company, this has left it in a bit of a jam. Enter the Gripz – aka, 'get the kids interested in cars again, round two'. Another concept, but one that builds on the stupendous success of Qashqai and

Juke, and thus could get a free platform ride from the second-gen version of the latter. That's a could; is there a should?

The premise takes high-riding 2+2 crossover practicality, with all the access and visibility advantages that entails, and marries it to a low-slung coupe shape that launches Nissan's new 'emotional geometry' design language while attempting to capture some of the 'timeless' automotive passion iDX evoked so effortlessly. Retro? Clearly not, but squint and there really is something of the 240Z Safari Rally car about it, the official inspiration and cleverly retrieved precedent for the elevated stance.



Nissan iDX Nismo concept (top) has no business case; 240Z Safari (bottom) justifies raised height alternative

Nissan thinks this combination is the key to cracking open a whole new market of youthful buyers – a car that can commute in comfort yet still forge a true high-octane enthusiast connection on the weekend; multi-purpose in the manner of a BMW X4, but even closer to a sports car, and more affordable. 'High-octane' is also outmoded here, though, as the concept's wheels are driven by electric motors, the petrol engine demoted to generator.

How seriously do we take all this? The 370Z has always felt like a dinosaur, and Nissan's chief creative officer Shiro Nakamura is already suggesting there won't be a 390Z, saying 'Z needs more revolution than evolution.' Gripz hasn't been spelt with a Z on the end by accident...

CJ HUBBARD



Interior influenced by racing bicycles, hence exposed structural elements and carbon steering wheel



Carbon bonnet and boot lid echo lightweight schtick of exposed-structure interior, but also visually reference the 1971 and 1973 Safari Rally-winning 240Z, where matt paint was used to reduce glare. RX-8 style back-to-front rear doors aid access, and are feasible; gullwing fronts pure show

NEW CAR DEBRIEF > KIA SPORTAGE

1 Is it a Porsche, is it a plane? – No, obviously not. But the fourth-generation Kia Sportage does have a hint of Cayenne about it, and the designer waffle references 'the smooth and sharp shapes found on iconic modern fighter jets'. Er, right. Whatever you think of that, it is quite a step on for the model that already accounts for 27% of Kia's European sales.

2 Turbo power – a stronger, safer structure, Euro-tuned chassis and improved NVH are amongst the engineering highlights. Plus a new 175bhp 1.6 turbo petrol and a seven-speed dual-clutch auto for the first time. 2.0 diesels get more efficient.

3 Prettier on the inside – 30mm longer wheelbase and 40mm lower rear floor boost passenger room, while a new dashboard design emphasises horizontal lines and clarity. The rear seats recline in 17 steps, the front seats are available with power adjustment, and soft-touch materials are rife. Thinner pillars and taller glass increase visibility throughout.

4 Tooled up – safety kit includes autonomous braking, lane assist and road sign reading camera. Wireless phone charging and button-free 'smart power tailgate' also feature. On sale early 2016, new Sportage comes with front- or four-wheel drive.





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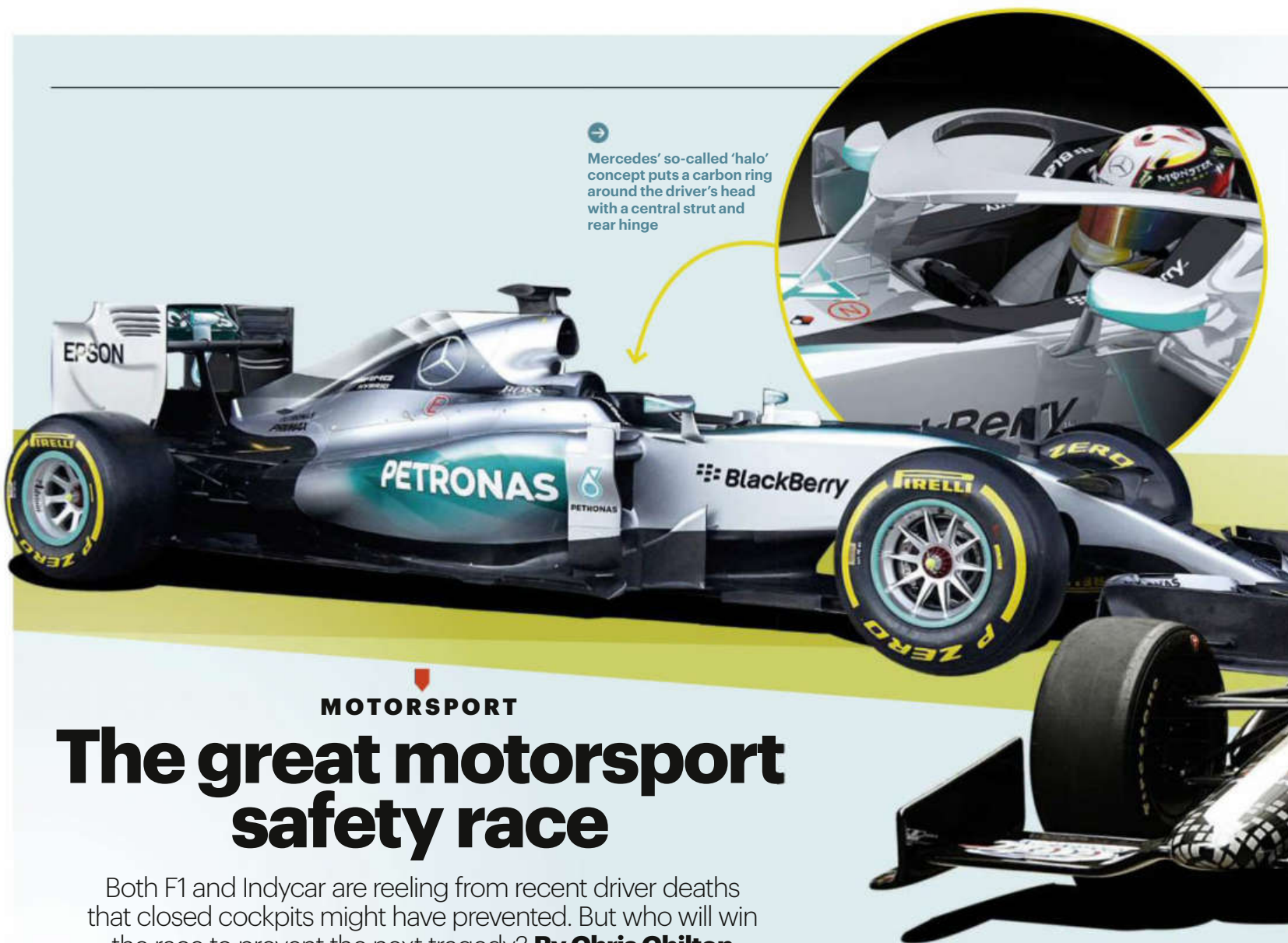
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Mercedes' so-called 'halo' concept puts a carbon ring around the driver's head with a central strut and rear hinge

MOTORSPORT

The great motorsport safety race

Both F1 and Indycar are reeling from recent driver deaths that closed cockpits might have prevented. But who will win the race to prevent the next tragedy? **By Chris Chilton**

F1 AND INDY – what's the difference?

They're both open-wheeled and powered by turbo-charged V6 engines, but F1 and Indy are quite different. While F1 manufacturers design and build their own cars, Indy teams race machines featuring the same Dallara chassis and a Honda or Chevrolet engine. Not all Indy racing is on ovals. Some takes place on conventional racing circuits, some on street circuits.

Which is more dangerous?

Eight drivers have died in the US series in the last 20 years, including 37-year-old Brit Justin Wilson, who last month succumbed to injuries sustained when a piece of debris from a crash ahead hit his helmet during a race at Pocono, Pennsylvania. In contrast, Marussia driver Jules Bianchi, who collided with a recovery vehicle at the 2014 Japanese GP, was the first to die as a result of taking part in an F1 race since Ayrton Senna in 1994.

'IndyCar is more dangerous than F1, and that includes the Indy road courses, as the track safety isn't on par with modern F1 tracks,' says British racing driver Alex Lloyd, who placed fourth in the 2010 Indianapolis 500. 'You strap in and you feel more vulnerable, you understand the risk is greater. But it's also the greatest rush imaginable. No road course can simulate entering a turn at 220+mph, cars inches apart. We need to maintain the spectacle, but we need to protect the drivers.'

What's been done recently to improve safety?

Both F1 and Indy use tough carbon chassis tubs, and it's this technology that kept Robert Kubica alive after his 2007 crash, and left Indy racer James Hinchcliffe with little more than a leg wound when he crashed his car into the wall in May at over 200mph. Formula 1 has improved run-off areas at dangerous corners like Monza's Parabolica, and all four oval tracks on the 2015 Indy calendar are fitted with deformable walls on all curves.

Both sports demand HANS devices and tethers to stop wheels breaking off and hitting other drivers (Henry Surtees, son of F1 champ John, was killed by a loose wheel in 2009), but the pressing concern in both sports remains the drivers' exposed heads. F1's Felipe Massa was seriously injured when debris punctured his helmet in 2009, and Indy's Dan Wheldon and Justin Wilson both died as a result of head injuries. IndyCar has been looking into closed cockpits, but done no testing; the FIA, the motorsport body that governs F1 (but not Indy), has already tested fighter-jet-style canopies.

What's stopping canopies from appearing on cars?

Several things. There are some concerns that drivers may end



The FIA tests cockpit canopies by firing a wheel from a nitrogen cannon at 140mph

The men who died

Jules Bianchi (left) and Justin Wilson are the latest drivers to lose their lives in F1 and Indy. Both sports want them to be remembered as the last to die. Frenchman Bianchi, 25, lay in a coma from his crash at Suzuka in October 2014 until his death in July this year. Wilson crashed on 23 August, and died a day later.



up trapped in upturned cars and unable to climb out, or that debris might be bounced into the path of other vehicles. One possible solution is a halo-like cage, demonstrated as a concept by Mercedes last month, that offers some protection and is hinged for access. There's also some resistance from fans and even some drivers, who see the open cockpits as a link with tradition, despite the fact that you can see almost nothing of the driver.

But according to motorsport broadcaster and journalist Marshall Pruett, who covers both F1 and Indy in the US, it's not a matter of *if* head protection will come, but *when*. 'I don't think there's been a lack of safety – if that debris had landed an inch to either side, Justin Wilson would still be with us – but I do think there's been a lack of urgency to get to the next safety advancement until now. I don't know whether it'll be a fighter-style cockpit canopy or something like the Mercedes proposal, but it's coming. I don't think Indy or F1 can survive any more head strikes.'

If closed cockpits are inevitable, who will get there first, F1 or Indy?

The FIA is rich and powerful, Indycar is a self-regulating body with far less cash, but will now receive the results of the FIA research. F1 cars will get the tech first, likely in the next 2-3 years according to Pruett. 'With Indy it's like F3; they'll mobilise to make changes, but it's going to take longer.'

@chrischiltoncar

↑
IndyCar and F1 face the same challenge: how to make racing safe but still exciting

Thanks to the Prius, Toyota's been ahead of the hybrid curve for 18 years



Events that rocked the car world

Prius electrifies the automobile

Toyota had its McLaren F1 moment in '97: the hybrid. Without it, there's no McLaren P1

IN 1997, CARS had a single propulsion source, a combustion engine which hummed at traffic lights as it sipped fuel. Then came Toyota's Prius. Between the low-revving, 58bhp 1.5-litre engine and its CVT 'box, Toyota sandwiched a generator-cum-electric motor, linked to a nickel-hydride battery pack behind the rear seats. The result? A small saloon that could drive on electric power alone up to 6mph, and whose low-stressed engine contributed to 77mpg – at a time when a Corolla mustered 38mpg.

Silent rolling on electric power still feels novel and intoxicating today; 18 years ago it was mind-blowing. It took nine drivetrain computers to manage the interaction between engine and motor, but the Prius felt seamless straight out of the box, being so simple to operate that your granny could have jumped in and driven away. Never mind that the Prius steered like it was sedated, toppled around corners, and that Toyota was reportedly losing £20,000 per car.

A small but vociferous tribe bought 123,000 of the first generation,

mostly in Japan. Other car makers were spooked: 'If we don't make a hybrid, people will think we can't shoot straight,' muttered GM product chief Bob Lutz. Then the second-generation came, saw and conquered, with 1.2 million sales.

The Prius's influence has been profound: stop/start engines are now mandatory, the Mk2's aerodynamic cigar-shape became *de rigueur*, and its zero emissions electric range is one answer to legislators' local air quality concerns. This year the Prius will smash through the 3.5 million sales barrier.

But the most exciting endorsement? The hybrid is now a means to unlock extreme performance, with hybrid systems propelling hypercar performance to unprecedented levels in the Porsche 918, LaFerrari and McLaren P1. And to think it all started with a funny little Toyota saloon...

Prius Mk1: 'twas a gamechanger



GETTY IMAGES

Return of the **hybrid king**

Toyota may have kick-started the hybrid movement in 1997, but the game's moved on. Do you still have to be a tree hugger (or tax hater) to want the new Mk4 Prius? **By Chris Chilton**

1

Major chassis upgrade

When it comes to B-roads, the Prius has always been firmly Z-list. To change that, the new one will be first Prius to be built on the Toyota New Global Architecture Platform. It delivers a lower centre of gravity and 60% increase in rigidity thanks to the use of high-strength steels. The claim is tight handling without having to suffer brutally stiff suspension.

2

Double wishbones!

Building on the TNGA chassis, Prius 4 ditches its boring old torsion-beam rear end for sporty-sounding double wishbones that produce 'one-third the level of shock when driving on uneven roads compared to the current Prius'. Also promised: reduced body roll in corners and better straight-line stability between them. Not promised: Caterham-catching ability.

3

Next gen hybrid power

Toyota hasn't released power and performance figures yet (or eco numbers, come to that), but we know the (still) nickel-metal hydride batteries offer greater energy density and the smaller electric motors an improved power-to-weight ratio. That should mean more electric assistance, more performance, a fuel economy boost of around 20mpg and a greater zero-emissions range. There'll be another plug-in version too.

4

An eye for Mirai – why?

Drawing design inspiration from Toyota's revolutionary but revolting Mirai, the world's first mass production fuel-cell car, the eye-catching Prius is still a device for people who want to wear their ice-cap loving hearts on their recycled hemp sleeve. Yes it's ugly, but that lower bonnet and sculpted tail help deliver a claimed 'world class' drag coefficient. The 2700mm wheelbase matches the old car's, but new Prius is 60mm longer.

5

Zen-like interior

Acupuncture? Essential oils? Meditation? Hot stones? Only a long weekend blissing out with the Dalai Lama is going to come close to delivering the 'peace of mind' experience Toyota wants the Prius's cabin to provide. We'll reserve judgement until we've seen and tried it but we're promised a better driving position, more glass thanks to the lower beltline, tactile materials and a whole lot more peace and quiet. Right on.

New cabin promises more light, less noise and oodles of calm

Mirai styling elements ensure a face only a mother could love



We hear

Juicy gossip from the CAR grapevine

BENTLEY should smash the 15,000 units barrier next year, thanks to the **Bentayga SUV's** 3600 projected sales. While it launches with a **W12** (read more on p76), we hear three other powerplants will grow volume further: **4.0 V8 petrol and diesels**, plus a **plug-in hybrid** mated to a

V6 or V8.

In 2016, the **facelifted Mulsanne** arrives, with an enhanced grille, restyled headlamps and bumper intakes. Just 50 to 100 **Gran Cabrios** may follow in 2017.

But the main event is the next-gen **Continental GT**, to be unveiled in **2017**. Adopting the **Porsche-engineered MSB platform** does wonders for the handling, with its front/mid-engined layout. Weight, rigidity and crash protection all improve. The **engine** line-up will grow with the



Bentayga's diesel and plug-in options. It should be a looker too, styled by **Luc Donckerwolke**, who we hear will resurface at **Hyundai-Kia** to replace **Peter Schreyer** in time.

And what of the beautiful **Speed 6 concept** (above)? The plan is to launch the **two-seater** in 2019, powered by a **600bhp twin-turbo V8**. A **roadster**

would follow, then the next twinkle in the brand's eye: a **Macan-sized SUV**.

Talking of SUVs, JLR's Special Vehicles unit will also make more hardcore **Land Rovers**, to complement its go-faster **Range Sport SVR**. They'll be badged **SVX**, and whispers suggest eagle-eyed Bond fans will be able to spot the badge on



a **Defender** in the new **Spectre** film (below).

Finally, it's an all-out **Astra** offensive at **Vauxhall**. Does that mean the red-hot **VXR** is imminent? Sounds like a successor to the 280bhp hooligan hasn't been signed off yet. A cooking **Astra**, with a 2.0-litre turbo turned up to around **250bhp** to bother Seat's lower-powered **Leon Cupra**, is nailed on for 2016. Expect it to draw the **GSi** badge out of retirement.

BEST MPV. AGAIN.

WHATCAR?
**Car of the
Year 2014**
Best MPV

WHATCAR?
**Car of the
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Best MPV



CITROËN GRAND C4 PICASSO

The Citroën Grand C4 Picasso is the first MPV in its segment to break the 110g CO₂/km barrier with the BlueHDi 150* delivering up to 72.4 MPG.[†] With its ultra-flexible 7-seat interior, 360° Vision Parking,[‡] Keyless Entry and Start,[§] and Panoramic Windscreen, it's no wonder it's been voted What Car? Car of the Year 'Best MPV' for two years running.

CRÉATIVE TECHNOLOGIE

   citroen.co.uk

CITROËN prefers TOTAL. Model shown: Grand C4 Picasso BlueHDi 120 S&S 6-speed manual Exclusive+. OTR price £26,665 (incl. Teles Blue metallic paint at extra cost of £520). *Available on Grand C4 Picasso Exclusive and above. †Combined Cycle on Grand C4 Picasso BlueHDi 150 S&S 6-speed manual Exclusive with 17" wheels. ‡Optional at extra cost on Grand C4 Picasso Exclusive+. §Optional at extra cost on Grand C4 Picasso VTR+ and Grand C4 Picasso Exclusive, available as standard on Grand C4 Picasso Exclusive+.

Official Government Fuel Consumption Figures (litres per 100km/MPG) and CO₂ Emissions (g/km). Highest: Grand C4 Picasso THP 165 S&S EAT6 Auto with 18" wheels: Urban 7.5/37.7, Extra Urban 4.9/57.6, Combined 5.8/48.7, 134 CO₂. Lowest: Grand C4 Picasso BlueHDi 100 S&S manual: Urban 4.5/62.8, Extra Urban 3.5/80.7, Combined 3.8/74.3, 99 CO₂. MPG figures are achieved under official EU test conditions, intended as a guide for comparative purposes only, and may not reflect actual on-the-road driving conditions.

WATCHES

Limited editions with limited prices

Like cars, watches get madly pricey at the mention of a finite production number. But not *always*...

IF YOU THOUGHT that fancy limited editions or new watches for which you need to put your money down months in advance were the preserve of the high-price Swiss brands, think again. Three of our favourite good-value, no-bullshit watchmakers have just launched eagerly-anticipated new watches in limited editions, or which you'll need to pre-order, or both. Two are British-designed with Swiss movements and the other is more Swiss than a cuckoo clock, yet they all cost well under a grand.

BEN OLIVER @thebenoliver

Elliot Brown Canford Clipper Race £395

Looks like a Bremont, bar the price tag

Elliot Brown watches are designed in the UK, use Swiss movements, and with their unique shock-proofing and triple-sealed cases, offer Rolex toughness at a tenth of the price. This special edition of the Canford model has been made for the crews on the eleven-month, 40,000-mile Clipper round-the-world yacht race, with 1000 being offered for sale. With two straps (canvas and oiled leather), a strap-changing tool and a fancy box, this is extraordinarily good value at £395, and can be pre-ordered now.

www.elliottbrownwatches.com



Christopher Ward C6 Trident Pro Vintage From £660

Embarrasses the big Swiss brands for value

Christopher Ward's diving watches have a specification almost identical to a Rolex Submariner's: a Swiss automatic movement, super-high grade 316L stainless-steel case and bracelet, water resistance to 600 metres and an indestructible ceramic bezel. When CW first launched, a few watch geeks thought they must be lying, bought the watches, disassembled them and found they were exactly what they claimed to be. The cynicism then turned into a cult-like following. You can pre-order the hotly anticipated new Trident now.

www.christopherward.co.uk



Mondaine Helvetica From £220

Not just for typography geeks Mondaine makes the famous Swiss railway watch, and last year launched a second range inspired by another exemplar of Swiss coolness and efficiency, the Helvetica typeface. Now there's a limited-edition smart-watch version available to pre-order. It's still fine value at £540, but if a simple three-handed watch is all the 'wearable tech' you need, we'd steer you back to the standard Helvetica range. It starts from just £220 but this big, all-black version on a canvas strap at £325 is our pick.

www.mondaine.com

NEW CAR DEBRIEF > MERCEDES-AMG C63 COUPE

1 Power of eight – Mercedes-AMG ain't messing around. The new C63 Coupe launches in standard and S guise, and even the former comprehensively out-punches the BMW M4, laying down 469bhp, 479lb ft and a thick layer of rubber, while its rival flounders about with 425bhp and 406lb ft. But then, as Merc smugly points out, it is the only car in its category to retain a twin-turbo V8.

2 Sexpress – C63 S ups the oomph to 503bhp and 516lb ft, but only shaves 0.1sec off the 0-62mph time (3.9 vs 4.0). Both remain rear-wheel drive. 155mph max can be increased to 180 – that's still limited.

3 Body modification – protein shakes a-go-go as AMG's C-Coupe grows 64mm wider at the front, 66mm wider at the rear, gains a 60mm longer bonnet and reinforced structure. Aero bumpers are complemented by chunky side skirts and a lip spoiler that's said to reduce lift at speed. Wider tyres and shorter rear axle ratios make it fractionally faster than the C63 saloon.

4 Progress through technology – in addition to the 'hot inside V' 5.0-litre biturbo, the C63 gets active engine mounts, electronic limited-slip diff, variable suspension and a faster-shifting seven-speed auto. Circa £65k and on sale in March 2016.



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TECH.

The innovations transforming our driving world

4

The part, in this case a wing mirror, is finished in hours, versus days or even weeks by other means. It's ready to be fitted to a clay for a styling review



3D printing's new industrial revolution

Capable of creating complex assemblies and design ideas in hours, 3D printers are revolutionising car design and engineering

BLOWING James Bond's DB5 to smithereens in *Skyfall* was sacrilegious, except that the Aston was a realistic one-third scale model made using 3D printing, the same technology that churns out thousands of low-cost bespoke hearing aids and that enabled Joel Gibbard, winner of this year's James Dyson Award, to make an inexpensive custom-fit prosthetic hand in less than two days.

Such is 3D printing's anticipated impact across manufacturing that *The Economist* has dubbed it 'the third industrial revolution', likely to have a similar impact on manufacturing as Henry Ford's production line for the Model T in 1913.

Jaguar Land Rover is in the motor industry vanguard embracing a technology that is revolutionising the way cars are designed

and tested. 'In 1992 we were among the first adopters of 3D printing,' explains Mark Barrington, JLR's prototype and tooling manager. 'In those days the processes weren't that capable but we could see the potential, and we're realising that today.'

'Wheel proposals used to be modelled in clay – a single wheel could take 10 days,' says Jaguar's director of design Ian Callum. 'Now we can print a full-size 22-inch wheel in a matter of hours. That's a huge saving in time, but 3D printing also ensures accuracy.'

JLR prints some 55,000 parts a year, at a cost of £1 million in materials. Printed components range from replica radiator grilles for validation models through to more fragile switchgear, key fobs and door-mirror casings (see illustration) for one-off concept cars.



3D printing is far faster and more accurate than traditional modelling materials

The reason for 3D printing's rapid rise from intriguing novelty to design and engineering must-have, says Barrington, is simple: time. When an OEM is developing a new car, time to market is of the essence. Get a new car into the showroom more quickly and you save money and slash the waiting time before revenues start rolling in.

Traditionally, many prototype components such as door handles, air-conditioning vents, trim and binnacles have been laboriously hand-crafted or produced from prototype tooling, a process that could take weeks or even months. Now a 3D printer can turn a computer aided design (CAD) file into a prototype part without tooling. Parts are produced in a fraction of the time, once they reach the front of the print queue (a day or two at JLR). This enables design itera-



tions to be evaluated and tested rapidly as engineers and designers seek optimal solutions. Because 3D printing's also an additive process – material added rather than machined away – there's no waste.

'On the engineering side, 3D printing is extremely useful for looking at the manufacturability of a proposed component,' explains Jaguar F-Pace vehicle line director Kevin Stride. 'You can do anything in CAD, but that doesn't always translate into an assembly that's real-world feasible. With 3D printing we can create the parts in question quickly, call people in from engineering and production to check that what we want to do is feasible. It's come a long way – a few years ago we could only print small parts.'

JLR uses four types of 3D printing, depending on the job. Polyjet modelling and

stereolithography are used for detailed components such as dials and switches – polyjet printers spray 30-micron thick layers of polymer resin which are then hardened by a scanning laser to build up the part; stereolithography sweeps a laser across a vat of resin, building the part up one 100-micron layer at a time. Laser sintering fuses thicker, 120-micron layers of nylon powder using a laser. In fused deposition modelling (FDM), layers are laid down in tough ABS plastic.

For now cost means 3D printing is a technology for design and engineering rather than production, though Barrington believes there are opportunities for halo products and personalisation: 'We could add high-value content to a small number of vehicles – that's when the public will start to see more automotive 3D printing.'



An inordinately tidy desk is not an essential requirement of CAD modelling

Download lowdown

The monthly test bench for in-car apps



THEAA

£Free/iPhone/Android

What is it? Route planner, breakdown assist, fuel-price oracle, parking locator...

How it works: Uses Google Maps and your location

Cool feature: Get reminders on MoT, tax and insurance

Usability: Excellent, but fuel prices, parking and breakdown assistance requires AA member ID

Rating: 8/10



FAST & FURIOUS: LEGACY

£Free/iPhone/Android

What is it? Street-racing sim inspired by the film, bro

How it works: *Gran Turismo* logic: access better cars and races as you progress

Cool feature: Great graphics, building and tuning your car is addictive

Usability: Good, but creating garage is involved, heavy pre-race narrative, early levels too easy. A game to immerse yourself in, not a quick fix

Rating: 6/10



TRIVAGO

£Free/iPhone/Android

What is it? Finds best hotel deals

How it works: Enter dates, current or future location, get cheapest room rates

Cool feature: Filter by price, rating, distance, availability of Wi-Fi, pool and more

Usability: Good but entering dates surprisingly clunky, no navigate-to-hotel option

Rating: 6/10



iPLAYER RADIO

£Free/iPhone/Android

What is it? BBC digital radio

How it works: Scroll through phone-like dial to your favourite BBC stations and connect to your car, even if you don't have DAB

Cool feature: Bad connection? Download beforehand and listen offline

Usability: Good, but requires USB or Bluetooth connection, and you'll need at least a steady 3G signal to listen live

Rating: 8/10

Does it work?

Remote-control Range Rover Sport



LAND ROVER'S PROTOTYPE smartphone app turns this Range Rover Sport into a remote-control off-roader. 'Over very difficult terrain, it's often necessary to have a spotter outside the car guiding you,' explains engineer Mark Cund. 'But when you're alone, or your passenger isn't an off-road expert, you might need to stop every few feet, climb out, and take a look.'

The smartphone and SUV communicate via Bluetooth, allowing the 'driver' to remotely control the steering, throttle and brakes, as well as select high or low range. We try it on a metal structure that simulates off-road terrain, dialling in a set percentage of steering and throttle, which are maintained until we instruct the app otherwise. We're able to simply walk around the car, checking for clearances, making sure its tyres are following the perfect trajectory. And, as Cund points out, the benefits extend beyond off-road use: you could remotely hitch a trailer, avoid getting in and out of the car to open and close gates, and park in tight spaces.

Safeguards are in place: there's a maximum speed of 4mph, the driver must be no closer than a metre away and no further than 10m, and if you let go of the phone, the

Range automatically stops. You also need to remove the keys from the car, preventing an opportunistic thief from hopping in.

I'm aware that we're in an environment of Land Rover's own design and that my off-road experience is limited. So what do independent off-road experts think?

'Remote control would be invaluable when you don't have a spotter and you need your vehicle positioning to be inch perfect,' says Neil Watterson, of *Land Rover Owner* magazine. 'Even with surround cameras, it can be difficult to reconcile the 2D image as a 3D landscape, so you end up getting out every couple of feet.'

'But remote control still requires a good understanding of off-road driving. Driving gives you constant feedback through the controls. With remote control, it may seem less real, so you could push the vehicle to more severe angles than you would normally. And if the front starts to slide and you're looking back at the vehicle, would you mistakenly turn the steering the wrong way?'

Land Rover won't be drawn on production timescales, but expect to see Discoverys reversing into tricky Waitrose parking spots very soon.

BEN BARRY @IamBenBarry

How to off-road by phone



1

YOU HAVE CONTROL

Smartphone allows you to control Range Sport's steering, throttle, brakes and a choice of high and low ratios

2

PERCENTAGE GAME

Set the steering and throttle to desired percentages, which are maintained until you tweak the settings or press brake button



3

GHOST DRIVER

'Driver' must be no closer than a metre from the car and no further than 10m; a 'dead-man's handle' ensures the car stops if the driver drops the phone

DID IT WORK?

Yes...

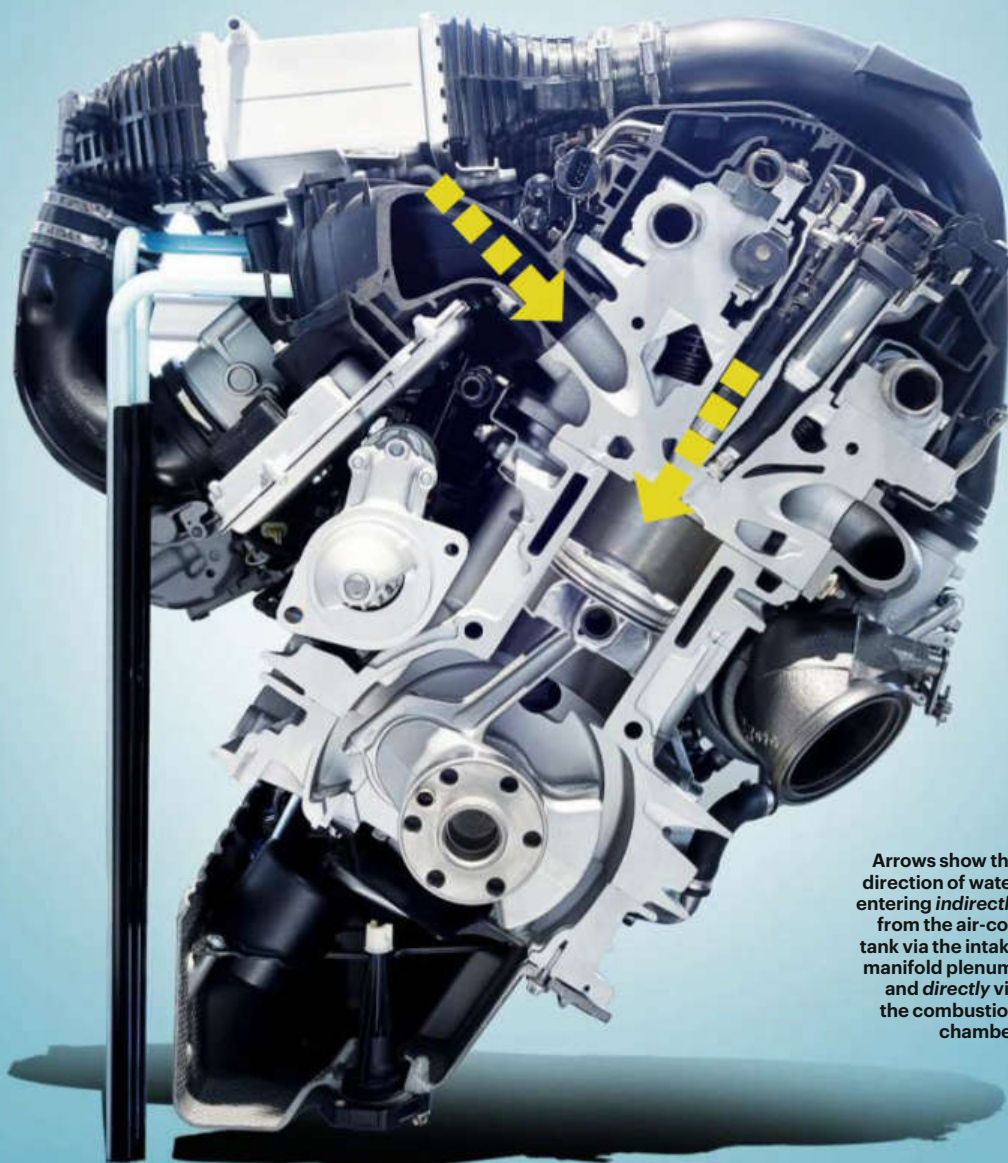
The app is simple to set up and easy to operate, and the safeguards are logically implemented too. Just remember that remote control won't turn an off-road newbie into an expert



4

HOW'S MY DRIVING?

Driver can ensure the car safely navigates the obstacle, removing the need to climb in and out to check clearance.



Arrows show the direction of water entering indirectly from the air-con tank via the intake manifold plenum, and directly via the combustion chamber

It's a miracle! BMW turns water into (engine) whine

Water injection promises more power, less fuel. By **Ben Barry**

BMW'S LATEST TECHNOLOGY sounds like snake oil: up to 10% more performance, and benefits to fuel efficiency that increase the harder you drive. But that's the promise with water injection. Even if you rarely drive flat-out, says BMW, you'll still get results. To prove the point, it's being demonstrated at polar ends of the line-up: ultra-efficient three-cylinder 1-series and ultra-powerful M4 GTS concept car, which use different versions of the technology. We took a look at BMW's Miramas test facility...

M4 GTS concept has indirect water injection. Production version gets it in 2016



①

Water injection, distilled

Water injection is not new. It's been used in turbocharged rally cars for years, and aftermarket kits filtered into the performance-tuning industry well over a decade ago. But the benefits to improving mpg have long been known. Why only introduce such a simple, cost-effective technology now? Because it's perfectly suited to turbocharged petrols, and BMW has gradually switched to forced-induction since 2006's 335i. Now every petrol BMW has a blower.

②

Coming on stream

The system in the M4 GTS is production-ready. Water generated by the air-con is pumped from a seven-litre tank and injected into the intake manifold plenum (indirect injection). When the water vapourises, it cools the intake air like a second intercooler. BMW quotes a 10% performance boost, but it's the fuel-efficiency claims that really stand out: **mash the throttle on track and there's a promised 23% improvement in mpg.**

③

The next wave

Further from production is the three-cylinder 1-series. It uses both indirect and direct water injection, water being injected straight into the combustion chamber for the latter method at a rate of around 30% to the amount of fuel. Once injected, water evaporates and cools the 100°C-plus combustion chamber by around 25°C. This reduces the chance of 'knocking', so the compression ratio can be ramped up from 9.5:1 to 11.0:1, improving low- to medium-throttle efficiency. There's only a 2-3% improvement in lab tests, but that rises to 3-8% in typical driving. And the extra power and full-throttle mpg benefits seen on the M4 GTS are retained.

④

Water-tight logic

When the engine is turned off, water in the pipes drains back into the tank, preventing icing in sub-zero temperatures, and engine corrosion. BMW says it should be unnecessary for 80% of drivers to ever re-fill the tank, only very hard driving or exceptional temperatures dictating otherwise.



FRÉDÉRIC DUVERNIER

surfers and they loved icons like the VW Combi and our old Méhari beach buggy. But why shouldn't modern cars slot into people's lifestyles too? I hope in future we can offer accessories for more niches, so customers don't have to go to aftermarket suppliers like Thule to carry their surfboards and bicycles. We should be providing for our customers' needs.

> **Airbump** is an example of design and engineering working hand in hand. The styling team came up with the concept originally and had no idea how it might work in production. It could have been inflatable or a special material – but the engineers went away and made it work. People either love Airbump or hate it. We will continue to develop the technology, but it won't feature on every new Citroën moving forwards. It divides opinion too much.

The next big things by Citroën's Cactus designer

Frédéric Duvernier, external design lead on the Cactus M, talks simplicity, romance, innovation... and surf dudes

'WE BELIEVE THAT CARS are becoming overcomplicated and overdesigned. The Cactus M is all about the spirit of simplicity. All the best old Citroëns have a romantic feeling to them: the 2CV, the Méhari, the DS. That's what we're trying to recapture here.

> **Cars are** becoming more complicated yes, but don't assume everyone wants more gadgets. My young designers in their 20s are buying 'young-timers' in their spare time - '80s and '90s cars like Porsche 944s. They appreciate simple pleasures. If we do add technology like safety features to our range, they should operate seamlessly in the background.

> **We've designed** the Cactus M around the surfer lifestyle: we spoke to real

> **We love** pushing our designs to the limits, but we have to be constrained by economic reality. Headlamps are a case in point: we can do amazing things with LED lights, but one LED costs more than six bulbs. There's no point designing something that's going to add €500 to the retail price if it puts the car out of reach of its typical customers.

> **Innovation is** what Citroën is all about. The DS famously pushed the boundaries and so did the Traction Avant – one of the first cars with a monocoque chassis. It made it 200-300kg lighter than the competition. That's true innovation.

> **Citroën can** do luxury cars still – it's just a different expression. It can be relaxing, like yachting. That's the French meaning of luxury – it'll be very different from the German premium way of doing it.

> **Depending on** the project we're working on, we occasionally ask the Citroën heritage team to bring up one of the old models from our back catalogue. We can't drive them, but they do spend time in our studio. There's no greater inspiration.'

INTERVIEW BY **TIM POLLARD**

FRESH THINKING: Share your Mini BMW to take private hire to the next level

Minis are in car hire clubs already: what's new here?

Yes, BMW and Sixt's DriveNow scheme operates in nine cities globally, allowing members to unlock and hire a car off the street with nothing more than a smartphone app. The big difference, come 2016, is that your

privately owned Mini can join in.

Sounds inconvenient...

Don't worry, you won't rush out late for work only to find your Mini has rudely disappeared: you'll be able to digitally log your car's availability when it suits you. It's all part of the 'sharing economy',

which BMW thinks Mini owners open-mindedly embrace. **What hardware is required?**

Mini is still working on the finer details, ahead of launch in the US next year. But it will require an 'optional equipment package' to make your car compatible with DriveNow. The Mini's inbuilt SIM

card will be vital, to locate the car and transmit big data.

A nice earner?

Mini is yet to confirm the financial rewards for membership, nor the sanctions against someone who leaves a fag burn in your seat. Hopefully it'll have more teeth than being unfriended on Facebook...



It works even better if you live next door to the arrivals hall at JFK



BE ONE WITH IT

Be one with your tyres, and the road will be one with you.



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ventus S1 evo²

Luxury that never compromises safety

With an advanced VAI system that allows drivers to track vehicle alignment and aerodynamic sidewalls that minimise noise and vibration levels, the ventus S1 evo² delivers the promise of performance and enhanced fuel efficiency.


Hankook
driving emotion

FIRST DRIVES.

12 cars tested, starring BMW 7-series, Clio Trophy, Discovery Sport, McLaren 675LT & four compact SUVs



UK 7-series buyers will now be offered xDrive for the first time, so your imperious progress needn't be halted by a small patch of snow



FOR WHAT IS, in principle if not execution, one of the most traditional and conservative of cars, the new 7-series is pretty adept at prompting bouts of child-like wonder. Not merely from the effortless, polished powertrain, the library-at-midnight near-silence of the cabin or the impressively nuanced chassis – they're almost givens on BMW's flagship – but for the arsenal of impressively resolved technology packaged into its vast steel, aluminium, magnesium and now carbonfibre structure. (Elements wrought in the latter arrive on Munich's biggest barge to boost rigidity and reduce weight – by a claimed 130kg – its use made feasible by the 7's modest volumes and immodest pricing.)

An example. You're firing down a stretch of gently undulating dual-carriageway, your surroundings of lacquered wood, baby-soft leather and cool aluminium made more inviting still by the evening light's warm colour palette. The vivid head-up display details your next move via a crystal-clear map. Up front, the car's kidney grilles open and close to balance a low-drag nose

with cooling demands. Cruise control is setting your speed, just as Lane Departure Warning assist, linked to the 7's now electric power-steering, is keeping you on the straight and narrow. Sounds serene but there's a problem – *Sweet Child o' Mine's* solo is moments away and it's threatened by both insufficient volume and an incoming call. So you reach into thin air and, with a curt swipe in front of the iDrive display, decline the call. You then straighten your index figure, as if pointing at the screen, and rotate it clockwise. On screen the Bower & Wilkins volume display appears and ramps up to loud, to better broadcast the strains of the Gibson Les Paul. Is gesture control any safer or easier than twirling a knob? Debatable, but turning a volume knob doesn't make you smile inside.

Another one. You're running late for your flight and the only parking bay is tight, too tight to comfortably climb from the broad-of-beam 7. So you park in front of the empty bay, jump out and use the car's iPad-esque wonder-key to bring up the remote park function. Now watch as your driver-less car uses its cameras and ▶

BARRY HAYDEN

BMW 7-SERIES

Back to the future

Cars come no more old school than this, another vast luxury saloon from Germany. But when they're as good as the sixth-generation 7-series, who needs revolution?

PDC sensors to drive into the bay. Turn off the engine, grab your case and you're gone. Struck down with OCD just minutes later – did you lock it? Check on the key, while also glancing at remaining fuel range and the status of the lights. And if you're really bored you can programme the climate control to kick in ten minutes before you get back to the car tomorrow.

The new 7-series is BMW's reconciling of a potentially outdated concept – a three-box luxobarge – with the 21st century's idea of luxury. Does luxury still mean floor-to-ceiling leather and carpet of sufficient depth to conceal a cat? Apparently so, but it's also about choice, and about taking the compromise out of conventionally mutually exclusive attributes such as performance and efficiency, agility and a plush ride, serene isolation (Executive Lounge Seating lets you get almost horizontal in the back seat, all the better to gaze at the Skylounge roof) and being connected (inductive phone charging, 4G Wi-Fi), and having a car that's almost autonomous with assist systems but that doesn't also require a six-week pre-flight training course.

With self-levelling air suspension and electro-mechanical anti-roll bars (more efficient and

faster-acting than hydraulics), the 7 can be both an engaging cross-country ally and a serene, road-smothering limo. In Comfort Plus the 7 feels S-class comfortable, though it also feels every inch and kilogram of its size and bulk, particularly in long-wheelbase form. But in Sport, which tenses the chassis and drops it lower over the wheels, the 7 delivers driving dynamics beyond those of the Mercedes, with tight, confidence-inspiring body control and steering that, while hardly sparkling thanks to the needlessly chubby rim, is nevertheless direct and encouraging. For the best of both worlds select Adaptive and let the car effectively tune itself as you travel, analysing your driving style together with information from the car's cameras and nav to optimise the ride and handling. It works well, though Sport's ride quality is so pliant you may choose to opt for that and leave well alone.

Perhaps remarkably given the complexity of the chassis' mechanical and electronic systems (peek into the wheelarches and you'll find NASA-grade machined aluminium hardware and

some serious-looking digital and pneumatic plumbing), the big BMW boasts clear lines of communication to each corner of the car, letting you drive with confidence – and even a smile on your face – on roads you'd expect to tie a limo in knots. Do luxury saloon buyers want a backroad playmate? Probably not, which is why for many the S-class is the default choice. But for those who appreciate balance, feedback and a little malleability, the 7 has to be king.

For now both UK engine options are sixes, with a plug-in hybrid to follow. The profligate and oil-allergic can opt for the 322bhp 3.0-litre petrol with its claimed 40.4mpg. But most UK buyers will go for the 730d. On paper its peak power figure of 261bhp looks a little limp for a car of this size but it never feels that way on the road, its ever-present torque – 457lb ft from 2000rpm – and the Skynet-clever eight-speed auto 'box working to deliver ample performance (6.1sec 0-62mph; 5.8sec with xDrive, now available on UK 7-series for the first time) without so much as a suggestion of strain.

UP AGAINST

BETTER THAN
Mercedes-Benz S-class

If you enjoy driving

WORSE THAN
Range Rover

But then the Range's more expensive

WE'D BUY
BMW 730d

And be very happy indeed...

As engaging to steer as it is forgettable to gaze upon





iDrive display can summon a 3D image of the car and its surroundings, for black-belt parking manoeuvres

BMW 730d

> **Price** £64,530

> **Engine** 2993cc 24v inline six, 261bhp @ 4000rpm, 457lb ft @ 2000-2500rpm

> **Transmission** Eight-speed auto, rear-wheel drive

> **Performance** 6.1sec 0-62mph, 155mph (limited), 60.1mpg, 124g/km CO2

> **Weight** 1755kg

> **On sale** Now (first deliveries October)



Long-wheelbase cars (not pictured) add 140mm of legroom, for the comfort of backseat supermodels

The hushed, refined diesel is a fine fit for the car and the automatic gearbox similarly talented, whether it's shuffling into higher ratios imperceptibly or responding to your urgent tugs on the downshift paddle. That said the 7-series doesn't encourage much interaction with the latter, not least because, with the diesel's muted soundtrack, it's easy to

blunder into the rev limiter.

Better to sit back and let the car's far bigger brain take up the slack, and when you do, the intrinsic rightness of the 7's cabin makes itself known. Some buyers, particularly those with no intention of ever driving, will prefer the S-class's lounge-like interior, but for clarity, ease-of-use and sophistication, the more car-like but equally artful 7 cabin wins. Yes it's an obvious evolution of all that has gone before, and of the inside of Munich's smaller contemporary saloons, but what price an all-pervading sense of calmness and order despite the car's myriad systems and almost infinite scope for personalisation, from

fragrance to severity of back massage?

The traditional iDrive controller accesses most functions, now with a trackpad top that allows for pinch-zooming and swipe-scrolling of maps. It's backed up by voice and aforementioned gesture control, touch elements to the climate control and a few logically ordered buttons. Sounds like a multi-media horror show; works beautifully. And this is a beautiful cabin generally. Just as the exterior is almost willfully restrained, studded with only the lightest of extrovert touches – the flash of chrome from the vent aft of the front wheels like a comet's tail, the blue jewellery that denotes optional laser tech in the headlights – so the cabin majors on simple forms beautifully wrought. Witness the way in which Touch Command's Samsung tablet – upon which you can buy and sell, send emails and check the nav for time to destination – rises from its dock on demand, and the elegant, almost

Tate-worthy door handles.

Need to spend a good chunk of your life on the road? This is the car to do it in. For all its innovative, mostly brilliant new systems, the 7 remains a compelling driving machine, one able to morph at will between leather-lined isolation chamber and rewarding, communicative sports saloon. And that's not something that's likely to go out of fashion anytime soon.

BEN MILLER

▶ **LOVE**
Dynamic flair, tech, deeply satisfying quality

▶ **HATE**
Dull exterior styling, porky steering wheel

▶ **VERDICT**
Serious saloon brilliance

★★★★★



RENAULTSPORT CLIO 220 TROPHY



Remember the sensational Clio Williams? We can't imagine Sir Frank getting on the blower to cut a deal for one of these

Clio Renaultsport Nav 220 Trophy

Price £21,780

Engine 1618cc

16v turbocharged

4-cyl, 217bhp @

6050rpm, 207lb ft

@ 2500-4000rpm

Transmission Six-speed dual-clutch, front-wheel drive

Performance

6.6sec 0-62mph,

146mph, 47.9mpg,

135g/km CO2 **Weight**

1204kg **On sale** Now

Sadly not the winner's Trophy

They could have saved the Clio RS by junking the auto 'box. Instead they fiddled, and it isn't enough

POOR OLD RENAULTSPORT.

Everyone's a bit down on the current Clio RS, and that's partly the fault of the old one. Because it was brilliant.

Revvily, frantically brilliant. And the new one, with its bigger body, smaller (turbo-charged) engine, softer set-up and fashionable – yet not universally popular – paddleshift gearbox simply can't feel quite as special.

Here's Dieppe's first attempt at a patch: the harder, faster Trophy version. Even that's a badge with baggage, as it follows in the gently smoking tyre tracks of the rabid 2005 Clio Renaultsport 182 Trophy and totally track-minded Megane



Gearchanges are 50% faster, there's more power and stiffer suspension. Should have worked...

Renaultsport 265 and 275 Trophies – adrenaline-soaked, absorbing hot hatches all. Good job the suspension's firmer to carry all that weight of expectation.

Trophyising the Clio RS has involved a multitude

of alterations, headlined by a 10% power increase to 217bhp courtesy of a new, faster-spinning turbo, altered exhaust, redesigned air intake and fiddled-with management software. The suspension's stiffer and lower (by 20mm at the front, 10mm at the rear), the steering ratio's quicker and the tyres stickier Michelin Pilot Super Sports.

Simply installing a clutch pedal and manual gearbox would probably have done more to appease the critics, but no doubt that would have added cost, production line complexity and been a most un-Napoleonic admission of defeat. So the paddles are still there but they now swap the gears faster – up to 50% swifter in 'Race' mode – and they don't move as far, so psychologically they *feel* faster too. A 300rpm higher rev limiter also means late-braking types can demand downshifts a bit earlier.

All encouraging ingredients, but on the road they somehow don't quite add up to the step change you might have been hoping for. The engine punches hard but still sounds like a hairdryer, and while you don't need to pull the plastic shifter paddles as far, they still feel curiously unsatisfying to use, as if they're not actually connected to anything. And that's how the driver



Who's going to tell Renault that splashes of red, nice though they are, don't make it a thrilling car to drive?

feels too. To be clear, this is by no means a bad car to drive. It's certainly an agile one; front-end grip is apparently limitless in the dry, geeing you to turn in ever later, and it's genuinely fast. It's just not all that exciting. Somehow you don't feel all that involved in the driving process, and not only because a computer's changing gear for you. I'm not sure the paddles are the issue here; the too-high driving position and flat-of-note, flat-of-torque-curve engine are bigger ones, but the biggest is charisma – or lack of. For all its red seatbelts and fake carbon the Trophy's somehow missing a sense of occasion, a bit of character to draw you in.

Unfortunately for Renault, that's something the RS Clio's rivals aren't short of – turn to our test of four small hot hatches on p104 to find out which pushes our buttons hardest. Sadly, despite Renaultsport's best efforts, the fastest Clio still can't.

JAMES TAYLOR

@JamesTaylor_5

LOVE
On-paper promise

HATE
Lack of on-road engagement

VERDICT
A Trophy, but sadly not a winner's one



TOYOTA GT86 COSWORTH

Doping allegation

Like a once-weedy athlete suddenly turning up ripped, the GT86 has been to Cosworth for a course of steroids

THE CHASSIS could definitely handle more power – surely one of motoring writing's greatest clichés. Current leading receiver of this backhanded compliment has got to be the Toyota GT86. More than any other contemporary it is at once utterly beguiling and immensely frustrating: blessed with a rear-wheel-drive chassis of fantastic charisma; hamstrung by an engine that's gutless as a Filet-O-Fish.

Enter Cosworth. While strapping on a supercharger isn't the most innovative approach to increasing the stock 197bhp, open the bonnet and the quality of the install is

obvious. The custom inlet and intercooler set-up looks right at home, and with a full exhaust upgrade, multi-map ECU and bespoke low temperature radiator you get 290bhp.

Since this still arrives all the way around the dial at 7000rpm, the Cosworth continues to reward you for wringing it out. Difference is the top-end fireworks don't just come in with a bigger bang, they're now the culmination of a proper show. Engineered to feel as OEM as possible, there's no sudden surge of torque on the way to the new 243lb ft peak, but with the standard car's 151lb ft brushed aside at a little over 1500rpm, the performance hike is... dramatic.

0-62mph feels as fast as the estimated sub-5.0sec (down from 7.6), but because you no longer have to bounce off the limiter it's a much more grown up experience. Counterpoint to this newfound maturity is dual-purposing the cruise-control stalk to swap between the four engine maps – a touch

worthy of 007. Map one makes the engine safe for 95ron, map four activates all the toys, including launch control and ever-so-amusing flat-shift function. Everything is well within the tolerances of the original components, though the supercharger and cooling kit are apparently good for 400bhp if you fancy getting your hands dirtier.

Before fitting you're looking at nearly £5k for the engine overhaul, nearly £4k for the (slightly boomy) exhaust, and you'll be wanting the (mega) £2100 Cosworth/AP Racing brakes. Which require bigger wheels. A convincing conversion, but sadly a misguided set of aftermarket suspension from another supplier means this car doesn't quite nail its full potential.

CJ HUBBARD @ir_427

↑ If it was a 100m sprinter we'd be highly suspicious

Toyota GT86 Cosworth Stage 2

> **Price** £4794 (s/charger kit) + £3768 (full exhaust) + fitting + donor car > **Engine** 1998cc 16v boxer 4-cyl with Cosworth supercharger and exhaust, 290bhp @ 7000rpm, 243lb ft @ 5000rpm > **Transmission** 6-speed manual, rear-wheel drive > **Performance** 5.0sec 0-62mph, 150mph, 26-28mpg (est) > **Weight** 1300kg > **On Sale** Now > **Rating** ★★★★★

VERDICT Worth nearly every one of the many pennies it costs



↑ Supercharger pumps the power by almost 100bhp. Beautifully done, too

MARK RICCIONI

VAUXHALL VXR8 GTS AUTO

Paddle screamer

SURELY PUTTING AN automatic gearbox in the VXR8 flies in the face of the car's simple, mechanical charm? *Au contraire*, mate. It suits the big-torque, low-effort muscle-car ethos down to a T. You'll pay around £1700 extra for the auto, a GM-sourced torque converter with six speeds and override paddles on the wheel. Like the manual car, it puts the rear wheels in touch with 6.2 litres of supercharged aluminium V8, but if you're expecting a Bathurst iron thunder soundtrack you might be disappointed by the muffled, muttery reality. The transmission has its hands full – the V8 can summon 546lb ft of twist from 3850rpm – but it copes admirably, shifting smartly with the

paddles and unobtrusively by itself. There's an occasional reluctance to kick down, but that's easily sorted by a click of a paddle.

Feels like there's a bit of twist going on in the body too; at speed on a bumpy B-road you get the impression the heavy (yet dead-feeling) steering isn't completely in charge, although that long wheelbase does make for predictable handling overall. None of the niggles matter, anyway. The VXR8 has its own niche but loyal following, who would never buy an M3 or C63 and are likely to take advantage of the LS7 engine's endless tuneability. In which case, picking the manual gearbox, all the better for burnouts, probably makes more sense.

JAMES TAYLOR @JamesTaylor_5

→ Works as well in Bath as it does in Bathurst



Vauxhall VXR8 GTS 6.2 paddleshift auto

> **Price** £56,234 > **Engine** 6162cc 16v V8 supercharged, 577bhp @ 6150rpm, 546lb ft @ 3850rpm > **Transmission** Six-speed auto, rear-wheel drive > **Performance** 4.1sec 0-60mph, 155mph, 18.0mpg, 373g/km CO2 > **Weight** 1892kg > **On sale** Now > **Rating** ★★★★★

VERDICT Row your own, mate

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

Czech space programme

Skoda's flagship achieves the impossible by getting bigger, lighter and more premium. Pack a brolly.

You no longer have to stand under Rihanna's umbrella – you've got your own stashed in the door cubbies

SKODA HAS MANY boasts to make about the new Mk3 Superb, but only one matters: they've doubled the number of umbrella cubbies. Think about it. Two umbrellas can now be stowed discreetly in the doors rather than just the one in the previous model. Surely Carl Benz didn't see this one coming.

If Skoda's feeling smug, though, I can't blame it. This new Superb is one hell of a car. It's so good you wonder if Skoda's boss will be summoned to the VW Group headmaster's office to explain why he's upset the product strategy appcart by making a better car than VW itself. More mystifyingly, you look at the pricetag (this Superb SE 1.6 TDI is £22,790 OTR, and a whopping £26,275 as tested) and you question whether Skoda has now discard-

ed its sackcloth and donned a suit – perhaps without permission from Wolfsburg.

The Superb was always about space, and this one's even bigger than the last. They've somehow eked another 85 litres of cargo capacity out of the already huge boot (now 1950 litres, seats down, which is 170 litres more than a Passat estate, 95 more than an E-class wagon) and the amount of legroom in the rear is hilarious, courtesy of an 80mm longer wheelbase. It's like a long-wheelbase limo – the rear doors are literally Phantom-like (though conventionally hinged).

It looks superb, too, Skoda having kept its nerve sufficiently to bring quite a bit of the sharp, jewel-like attitude of the Vision C concept to the road. Inside, though, the attitude is missing – it's rather bland, rather VW parts bin, and although there's nothing wrong with that, maybe Skoda should indulge in a bit of fairy dust, a splash of colour or a funky gearknob.

The driving experience also lacks pizzazz, but that's not to condemn it. The 1.6 turbodiesel does feel a bit wheezy. It's not a torque monster, which means you never quite feel in the meat of the curve, and you end up shuffling the manual 'box (lovely gearchange, incidentally), spending too long at higher revs and forcing the engine into high-pitched chatter worthy of a hen-night. The alternative 2.0-litre diesel might be wiser.

The steering's numb but linear,



Onto VW's sombre, effective interior they've sprinkled... nothing, sadly

the primary ride decently composed (some nuggety ridges upset it a bit) and you can corner as fast as the powertrain allows (ie, not very) without understeer. Hardly the point, though.

Further rumblings of discontent at VW will be provoked by the equipment levels on offer. Our SE gets 17in alloys, adaptive cruise, dual-zone climate and DAB as standard, to which they added keyless go, the so-called 'virtual pedal' which lets you open the boot by wafting your foot under the bumper, and £1600-worth of sat-nav.

So, a lot of car for the money, but what are we supposed to make of Skoda today, a generation on from its VW-sponsored rebirth? Buyers can still be smug about choosing wisely, yet they're no longer getting *quite* the bargain they used to be, especially in a world where the Koreans produce great cars at punchy prices (with warranties that make Skoda's three years look a bit stingy). With the Superb, though, maybe space swings it. That, and umbrellas.

GREG FOUNTAIN

@GregFountain1



Is there an echo in here? (Is there an echo in here?)

Skoda Superb Estate

Price £22,790 **Engine** 1598cc 16v turbodiesel 4-cyl, 118bhp @ 3500rpm, 184lb ft @ 1500rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive **Performance** 11.0sec 0-62mph, 127mph, 67.3mpg, 109g/km CO2 **Weight** 1485kg

On sale Now

▶ **LOVE**
Looks, kit list, umbrella cubbies

▶ **HATE**
Character not an option

▶ **VERDICT**
All the car your family will ever need, only bigger

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A leap forward in reverse parking.



NEW FORD **FOCUS**

➤ **Active Park Assist**

How do you park in a space you can't even see? Trust the new Ford Focus. It can find even the most elusive spot, then assist you to park in it, whether it's parallel or even reverse parking. Just one of the many ways that the new Ford Focus can help you go further. ford.co.uk/newfocus

Official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the New Ford Focus Range: urban 32.1-74.3 (8.8-3.8), extra urban 49.6-91.1 (5.7-3.1), combined 41.5-83.1 (6.8-3.4). Official CO₂ emissions 159-88g/km.

The mpg figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results (EU Directive and Regulation 692/2008), are provided for comparability purposes and may not reflect your actual driving experience.

Active Park Assist is standard on Titanium X and available as an optional extra on Zetec, Zetec S and Titanium.



Go Further



McLAREN 675LT

Fast Darwinism

Talented 650S evolves into magnificence

UP AGAINST

BETTER THAN

Lamborghini Aventador SV
Sorry Lambo, but LT trumps SV

WORSE THAN

McLaren P1
But it's closer than you might think

WE'D BUY

McLaren 675LT
Except they're all sold

S LOWER BURNING THAN one of those unfeasibly slothful fuses on a TV-movie stick of dynamite, McLaren's Super Series range has finally exploded into true greatness with the introduction of the 675LT. Somehow managing to blend the raw dynamism of a full-on track machine with most of the civility of the 650S, it packs the best power-to-weight ratio in its class and a kick like a railway gun when the turbos get going. If big brother P1 had a collar, he'd be nervously tugging it away from his neck right now.

The LT stands for Longtail, and the car is McLaren's answer to the likes of the Lamborghini Superleggera and Porsche GT3 sub-brands. The name's derived from the mighty late '90s F1 Longtail racers, but don't take it too literally. Yes, the rear bodywork aft of the B-pillars is all new – and all carbon – and the rear airbrake is half as big again, but the name is less about extra inches and more about the original Longtail's tweaked drivetrain, chassis and aerodynamics, implemented to keep the F1 competitive in the years following the '95 Le Mans win.

The 650S is already a bit of a weapon. McLaren could have just tweaked the 3.8-litre V8's ECU

and exhaust to unleash a few more ponies, nuked a few kilos of soundproofing and made an easy killing. Instead, one third of the components that make up the 650S were changed to create the 675. Half of the engine parts are new. No wonder it costs £259,500 (£290k for our test car), £61.5k more than the base 650.

You'd pay a good chunk of that just for visual improvements, never mind that the new front splitter, side skirts the rear end's diffuser and larger airbrake contribute to a 40% improvement in downforce. Predictably, every pretty new part has a purpose: the swollen rear arches cover side-mounted radiators twisted outwards to improve cooling. The wheels are McLaren's lightest yet, even lighter than P1's. The rear window is polycarbonate, slotted along each side to let heat from the engine bay escape.

Enough with the drooling. Let's drop into the carbon-backed bucket. The standard slim one fitted me perfectly, but there's a wider alternative for the stouter of frame, or you can always wimp out

and get the standard comfort seats if your girth is the sort that necessitates buying adjacent seats on every plane ride. In that case, both seat choice and driver would be a shame when McLaren's engineers turned the car inside out trying to save a gram at every turn to shred 100kg from a car that weighed a scant 1428kg to begin with.

That included the engine, whose lightweight internals and faster turbochargers give it a sharper edge than the modest 25bhp (for 675PS, a devilish 666bhp) power increase might suggest. But factor in the 100kg weight reduction and you're looking at a mammoth 579bhp per tonne – more than a Porsche 918 Spyder can boast.

Call for all of it at lower revs and there's a momentary pause, as if the car is asking 'are you sure?' before all hell breaks loose. It could seem crude coming off the back of Ferrari's impressively near zero-lag atmo-aping 488 GTB, if it wasn't such brilliant fun to feel this morning's breakfast catapulting itself worryingly in the wrong direction along your digestive

LOVE

Faster, more focused, better looking

HATE

Expensive, all sold

VERDICT

Pauper's P1

★★★★★



LT gets P1-style carbonfibre shift levers to go with P1-style brilliance

tract when you send the full 516lb ft to the rear tyres. The aero mods actually make the 675 2mph slower than the 207mph 650S at the very top end, but its 2.9sec 0-62mph and 7.9sec 0-124mph numbers are 0.1sec and 0.5sec quicker.

But you'll likely feel the new quicker-ratio steering kick before you feel the engine do the same. Even allowing for the LT's stickier Pirelli Trofeo tyres, the minute you roll away from standstill you notice the steering feels wildly different to the 650's. Meatier, more accurate. More deflection from road irregularities too, but hugely feelsome, and connecting you to a front end that no one seems to have taught how to understeer. You can downgrade the tyres to less tacky Pirellis if you want more wet weather security, but you'd be robbing the LT of one of its best tools, like asking Jimmy Page to play *Stairway...* with a mandolin.

Out on the road the LT lacks the sublime small bump absorption of the 650S but counters with better body control from suspension stiffened 27% at the front end and 60% at the rear. Apparently a faction within McLaren was surprised how supple the car felt at the handling targets they'd set and wondered if they should make it stiffer. Sense prevailed, fortunately. As it stands, the LT feels epic on A-roads, and still useable in town. But it's most at home on the track.

That much we expected. The sheer speed, stability, the colossal braking power, is all the stuff McLaren has offered from the start. But this time there's an open invitation to be a bit of a

hooligan too. The new ESP mode (now decoupled from three-position Handling mode) encourages sideways silliness; the burnout mode begs you to lay elevens. This car is about McLaren waking up to the fact that supercars are emotional purchases. Lap times matter, but showing off is a big part of the draw.

With an eye on maintaining exclusivity, McLaren is limiting production to 500 units, all coupes, and all sold. But this isn't the last of the Longtail, execs hinting that the brand will be rolled out to the new 570S junior supercar family. We haven't even driven that yet, but this first Longtail has us dribbling like infants at the prospect of a 590LT.

CHRIS CHILTON @chrischiltoncar

McLaren 675LT

Price £259,500

Engine 3799cc 32v V8, 666bhp@7100rpm, 516lb ft@5500-6500rpm

Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive

Suspension Double wishbone front and rear

Performance 2.9sec 0-62mph, 205mph, 24.2mpg, 275g/km CO2

Weight 1328kg

On sale All 500 sold out



Ultra-light wheels part of obsessive weight-saving programme. Step away from the steak sandwich



LAND ROVER
DISCOVERY SPORT

No more the tractor

At last the new Ingenium diesel marries Disco Sport. Will they be happy?



The good news: rainforests will be saved. The bad news: you'll be late for work

Land Rover Discovery Sport TD4 e-Capability

► **Price** £35,395 ► **Engine** 1999cc 16v 4cyl TD, 148bhp@4000rpm, 280lb ft@1750rpm ► **Transmission** Six-speed manual, four-wheel drive ► **Performance** 11.7sec 0-62mph, 112mph, 57.7mpg, 129g/km ► **Weight** 1775kg ► **On sale Now** ► **Rating** ★★★★★

VERDICT Better engine, but not the best version

THE ONE RATTLING, rowdy, profligate and patently obvious blot on the Disco Sport's copybook when we first drove it earlier this year was its uncouth diesel engine. JLR's new Ingenium diesels, as seen in Jaguar's new XE and XF, couldn't quite meet the Disco launch deadline so the baby Landie was forced to make do with tractor-tech.

The new 2.0 Ingenium is hugely better. Giving away 200cc and 10bhp to the old motor, but countering with 7lb ft more torque and a 23g/km CO₂ reduction, the 178bhp Sport now looks much stronger when it comes to the on-paper numbers that can make or break these cars. CO₂ falls to 139g/km while economy

heads the other way, to 53.3mpg, a 5mpg uplift.

But the e-Capability version goes further. Detuned to 148bhp, shorn of the handy 5+2 seats and available exclusively with a six-speed manual,



JLR's new 2.0-litre Ingenium diesel engine: better late than never

it dips to 129g/km and boosts economy to 57.7mpg, but takes an excruciating 11.7sec to reach 62mph. Is there another £40k car on sale quite so opposed to changing your rate of forward propulsion? We're pretty sure our collective conscience could suffer a few dead seals and a bigger tax bill to avoid that kind of lethargy. Even the 180 version takes 9.9sec in manual guise. Unless you're CO₂ obsessed, we'd go for a 180 with the nine-speed auto, a £1750 option, but a whole second quicker from the lights and with no eco penalty. Its bigger spread of ratios is guaranteed to better suit the Ingenium's 2-3500rpm sweet-spot, too.

But what of refinement, the old engine's big failing? Much improved. There's some clatter at

start-up, but once moving, unless you hammer it pointlessly past 4000rpm, it sounds hushed. Or maybe it was just drowned out by the disappointing wind and road noise.

Engine aside, the Disco Sport is unchanged. Packaging is brilliant and handling quite taut. But the interior, which has been highly praised elsewhere, is lacklustre. It looks and feels cheap, despite a £45k tag. Land Rover produces some incredible cars, but even in revitalised form, the Disco Sport is merely very good.

CHRIS CHILTON

@chrischiltoncar

NISSAN GT-R 45TH ANNIVERSARY

Champagne super Nissan

GIVEN ITS startling resemblance to the secret love child of a 1960s American muscle car and a must-have kitchen appliance of the same era, it's almost as hard to swallow claims of the GT-R's superior aerodynamic efficiency as it is to credit its extraordinary abilities. Books and covers spring to mind, however, because the last time I was similarly coerced into recalibrating my perceptions I was aboard something 25 times the price: a Veyron.

Excellent driving position aside, there's also little about a drab interior to give the game away. This 45th birthday special differs from the Premium model only by dint of its champagne colour and a £1700 price hike. Just five will

come to the UK. Even at tickover, diff passing the occasional unsolicited remark, all feels overtly mechanical and baggy; a soundtrack more usually associated with inadequately tightened nuts than uber-engineering. At the first belt of throttle, though, the tightening of nuts is universal. The GT-R truly is wickedly, relentlessly quick. Despite exhaust outlets of a diameter necessitating rigorous policing in the environs of Calais, it is not, however, that vocal.

The GT-R is far more adept at powerboating through teeming rain than this driver, and I crave more time with it on dry land. The only issue being that, after a week behind the wheel, six weeks behind bars seems inevitable.

ANTHONY FFRENCH-CONSTANT

Paintjob the only difference other than the price

**Nissan GT-R 45th Anniversary Edition**

► **Price** £79,780 ► **Engine** 3799cc 32v twin turbo V6, 542bhp @ 6400rpm, 466lb ft @ 3200-5800rpm ► **Transmission** Six-speed auto, all-wheel drive ► **Performance** 2.7 sec 0-62mph, 196mph, 23.9mpg, 275g/km CO₂ ► **Weight** 1740kg ► **On sale Now** ► **Rating** ★★★★★

VERDICT Gee, the price of paint these days

peugeot.co.uk/308

INTERNATIONAL
engine
of the year
awards 2015

1-litre to 1.4-litre
PSA Peugeot Citron
1.2-litre three-cylinder turbo



PEUGEOT 308

AVAILABLE WITH JUST
1.9% APR* REPRESENTATIVE



TOUCHSCREEN WITH SAT NAV
& REVERSING CAMERA



FULL LED HEADLIGHTS
& FOG LIGHTS



PEUGEOT RECOMMENDS TOTAL Official Fuel Consumption in MPG (l/100km) and CO₂ emissions (g/km) for the 308 Range are: Urban 38.2 – 80.7 (7.4 – 3.5), Extra Urban 61.4 – 97.4 (4.6 – 2.9), Combined 50.4 – 91.1 (5.6 – 3.1) and CO₂ 130 – 82 (g/km).

MPG figures are achieved under official EU test conditions, intended as a guide for comparative purposes only and may not reflect actual on-the-road driving conditions. *1.9% APR Representative up to 37 months. Terms and conditions apply, participating dealers only or visit peugeot.co.uk. Peugeot Motor Company PLC is acting as a credit broker and is not a lender. We may introduce you to a limited number of lenders to finance your purchase. Over 18s only. A guarantee may be required. Finance provided by and written quotations available from PSA Finance UK Ltd t/a Peugeot Financial Services, Quadrant House, Princess Way, Redhill, RH1 1QA. All offers available on qualifying vehicles ordered and registered between 01.07.15 and 31.12.15 or until such time as they may be withdrawn by Peugeot at its complete discretion. Excess mileage charges may apply. Model shown is a 308 Hatchback GT Line with metallic paint at £21,970. Touchscreen with satellite navigation and reversing camera, full LED headlights and fog lights are standard on a 308 Hatchback GT Line. All Information correct at time of going to press. Visit peugeot.co.uk for full terms and conditions.

PEUGEOT 308

MOTION & EMOTION



PEUGEOT



Caution! Hatchbacks crossing

They all want to be crossovers – it's the only way to crash the volume party. Who makes the best job of fooling suburbanites into believing they're king of the hill? **By Anthony ffrench-Constant**

Honda **HR-V**

'Greetings, Tim the Enchanter'

Honda's second foray into a compact crossover segment which it claims to have invented with its first HR-V in 1999, and then studiously ignored for a decade. Odd decision, and a long time to wait for...

Work of art, or turnkey tart?

...depressingly generic cross-hatch styling boasting more relentlessly creased surfaces than a Rolling Stones 50th anniversary photo call. An offensively inoffensive offering; in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

Interior design courtesy of blindfold and blunderbuss?

Previously criticised, but quite svelte in this company. Gently upright driving position, and outstanding rear packaging facilitating both winning legroom and ready transportation of dad's 1:250 Eiffel Tower made from Swan Vestas.



The Shard took less time to create

Mazda **CX-3**

'Greetings, Tim the Enchanter'

By what name are you known? As Katie Melua will probably never sing, this is the closest thing to a conventional hatchback posing as a crossover I have ever seen. Deflate the tyres for proof.

Work of art, or turnkey tart?

If the Jeep's cubic couture doesn't blow your frock up, then this is the best looking car here, even if there is a slightly unsettling semblance of the gurning Alan Partridge about the mouth parts.

Interior design courtesy of blindfold and blunderbuss?

Nope. In terms of design, detailing and homogeny, easily the finest interior execution of this group. Also the best driving position. Rear seats notably comfortable, but rather less so if you own respectable legs.



Mazda, like Federer, keeps hitting winners



Jeep Renegade

'Greetings, Tim the Enchanter'

A refreshing change from this raft of teetering hatchbacks wrestling with SUV nomenclature, this, first and foremost, is just a Jeep; alone here in offering proper off-road potential.

French curve fantasy, or turnkey Tonka?

Unapologetically the latter. Styled as the birthday packaging children attack with blunt scissors whilst studiously spurning the contents, the Renegade is chunkier than a 3am Newcastle-upon-Tyne pavement pizza. No bad thing in this company.

Interior design courtesy of blindfold and blunderbuss?

Absolutely. Instruments and switchgear inelegant and somewhat hastily applied. Driving position marred by gearchange-elbow-obsessed bin lid, and door bins sized for a pet chinchilla. More rear room than CX-3, but less comfort.



Fashion not function?
Nobody told Jeep

Fiat 500X

'Greetings, Tim the Enchanter'

Approve of the inappropriate, marketing-driven sub-species craze hatched by the lard-arse Mini Countryman? Then this just has to be the disease for you. Want a 500 but need a bigger car? This is supposed to be it.

Work of art, or turnkey tart?

From cute to corpulent in the puff of a bicycle pump. Something this swollen is usually extremely painful to the touch, so I suppose we must be grateful that the 500X is merely painful to the eye.



What Fiat 500 did
when it grew up

Interior design courtesy of blindfold and blunderbuss?

See Jeep for details; FCA instrumentation and switchgear miles behind Japan. Front of driver's seat base intrusively high unless the whole ensemble is raised to nosebleed status. Brutal rear-seat bench quarried from Welsh slate mine.

Honey, I Blew Up the Hatchback? Attack of the Slightly Taller Car? Gone in 10.5 Seconds? The Slow & the Ambivalent?

CONTINUED...

CONTINUED...

Honda **HR-V**

Toys R Us or hot fidgety fuss?

Touch panel air-conditioning all very well, but every bit as tricky to stab with Brutus accuracy on the move as any other screen. Best infotainment array here, and thoughtful his 'n' hers phone platform with twin USBs.



Not as jumbled as we first thought, and infotainment beats all-comers

Kiss goodbye to acid rain with an eco-friendly powertrain?

Engine surprisingly noisy, but feels consistently lively enough to make a mockery of bald 0-62mph figures. Far more engaging than the petrol alternative, in which 'VTEC' stands for Voraciously Tepid and Eco-Centric.

Drives like a hatchback after one too many Malibu & cokes?

Lovely, short-throw, rifle-bolt gearchange, the best helm here for accuracy and feel, and terrific brakes. One stout vodka Martini's worth of roll more than the Mazda equates to a far more pliant ride. A good thing.

Verdict

Clear space-race and flexibility winner, but otherwise presented as simply a 51st shade to add to an increasingly grey segment.

Mazda **CX-3**

Toys R Us or hot fidgety fuss?

DAB, sat-nav, Bose sounds, reversing camera and head-up display all standard, as are under-illuminated driver's binnacle numerals and annoying lane-departure warning system which must be switched off every time you switch on.



Brilliant seating position, unless you're shoehorned in the back

Kiss goodbye to acid rain with an eco-friendly powertrain?

Easily the least powerful unit here but, installed in easily the lightest car, still makes a decent, if vocal, fist of shifting the tin whilst winning both the fuel consumption and emissions stakes by a nose.

Drives like a hatchback after one too many Malibu & cokes?

Actually, just drives like a hatchback. Fine steering, slick gearshift, minimal body roll and sharp turn-in make for enthusiastic and engaging handling. But should a family car really ride like thimbles over a Zydeco frottair?

Verdict

The driver's car of the compact crossover segment, but at the price of somewhat tough love for the rest of the family.



MAZDA CX-3 1.5 105PS 2WD SPORT NAV DIESEL

> **Price** £21,895 > **As tested** £23,235
> **Engine** 1499cc 16v turbodiesel 4-cyl, 104bhp @ 4000rpm, 199lb ft @ 1600-2500rpm > **Gearbox** 6-speed manual, fwd > **Performance** 10.1sec 0-62mph, 110mph, 70.6mpg, 105g/km CO2
> **Weight** 1275kg > **On Sale** Now
> **Rating** ★★★★★

HONDA HR-V 1.6 I-DTEC EX MANUAL

> **Price** £24,945 > **As tested** £25,470
> **Engine** 1597cc 16v turbodiesel 4-cyl, 118bhp @ 4000rpm, 221lb ft @ 2000rpm
> **Gearbox** 6-speed manual, fwd > **Performance** 10.5sec 0-62mph, 119mph, 68.9mpg, 108g/km CO2 > **Weight** 1324kg
> **On Sale** Now > **Rating** ★★★★★

Jeep Renegade

Toys R Us or hot fidgety fuss?

The proximity of the 500X spotlights high levels of shared Fiat group wiring loom sub-strata tunnelling furtively under the dash, and attendant equipment. All the toys, however, including the only electric seat adjustment and heated helm.



Lots of cute little Jeep cues hidden in here. Fun, and electric seats too

Kiss goodbye to acid rain with an eco-friendly powertrain?

By the time a 1500kg kerbweight and permanent all-wheel drive have had their say, 400 extra cubic centimetres doesn't equate to all that much added oomph, whilst mpg and emissions suffer. A tad noisy.

Drives like a hatchback after one too many Malibu & cokes?

Indeed. Softest ride and more roll than the rest, but still well controlled, with a tenacious aversion to understeer. Steering less amusing; feels exactly akin to winding up the propulsion unit of a Keil Kraft Senator.

Verdict

Engaging, cartoon carton proposition for those seeking a genuine alternative to the segment norm. Stand-alone status enhanced by proper all-wheel drive.

Fiat 500X

Toys R Us or hot fidgety fuss?

Spec suspiciously akin to the Renegade's. Jeep's 4x4 drive mode switch substituted by 'Drive Mood Selector'; so 'Chilled' dashboard storage compartment presumably murmurs 'Hey man, what's happening?' when opened.



Strives way too hard for sassy chic. Swaps 4x4 button for mood selector!?

Kiss goodbye to acid rain with an eco-friendly powertrain?

On-paper performance parity with the Honda, but a far quieter, smoother unit which pulls lustily from lower revs. The only engine here quiet enough to allow road noise to dominate proceedings instead.

Drives like a hatchback after one too many Malibu & cokes?

Fine ride quality marred by poor seat comfort (the only thing it actually shares with the 500), but otherwise a quiet, perfectly pleasing proposition that may be chuckled about with greater alacrity than its remit justifies.

Verdict

May appeal to young, fashion-conscious, partially-sighted parents with cutesy-chic 500 aspirations. May appall many others.



JEEP RENEGADE 2.0 MULTIJET II LIMITED 140HP 6-SPEED

➤ Price £25,395 ➤ As tested £27,935
➤ Engine 1956cc 16v turbodiesel 4-cyl, 138bhp @ 3750rpm, 258lb ft @ 1750rpm
➤ Gearbox Six-sp manual, all-wheel drive
➤ Performance 9.5sec 0-62mph, 113mph, 55.4mpg, 134g/km ➤ Weight 1502kg
➤ On Sale Now ➤ Rating ★★★★★

SPEC FIAT 500X 1.6 MULTIJET 120HP CROSS

➤ Price £20,095 ➤ As tested £24,320
➤ Engine 1598cc 16v turbodiesel 4-cyl, 118bhp @ 3750rpm, 236lb ft @ 1750rpm
➤ Gearbox 6-sp manual, fwd
➤ Performance 10.5sec 0-62mph, 115mph, 68.9mpg, 109g/km CO2 ➤ Weight 1320kg
➤ On Sale Now ➤ Rating ★★★★★

Gavin Green

THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

'Toyota has no design DNA. Its designs are as ever-changing as David Beckham's hairdo, minus the style'



MY MONTH BEGAN driving an old Blower Bentley and finished in a new Toyota Avensis. So if variety is the spice of life, last month was a full-blown vindaloo experience with extra chillies and a double dash of ginger, cardamom and saffron thrown in.

The 1929 Blower is one of the most exciting cars I've driven, up there with the F40 and McLaren F1. Tall, imposing, loud, gutsy, absurdly valuable (£15 million said the nice man from Bentley – it was Tim Birkin's very car); plus complicated to use, arse-kickingly uncomfortable, wind-blown, gruff and Spartan. It needed a deft touch to drive (not least precise double-declutch gear shifts) and a heavy hand to steer.

The Avensis is none of these things. In fact, I'm not sure I can remember a single thing about it. As innocuous as magnolia paint, as memorable as last week's weather forecast, and as distinctive as a British High Street, it is one of those averagely good cars at which Toyota specialises: averagely good steering, ride, handling, seat comfort, performance, fuel economy, styling, spaciousness, refinement etc, and will no doubt give years of loyal service before ending its life on the minicab circuit, pine air-freshener dangling from (cracked) rear-view mirror.

It's the *Daily Mail* or the M&S underwear of cars, aimed at Mr and Mrs Average. Thus the UK target is men 5ft 9in tall who support Manchester United, weigh 12 stone 8lb, watch more than 40,000 hours of television in their lives, live in Swindon, holiday in Spain, have 1.8 children, have a 50% chance of getting divorced, watch *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, don't exercise, believe in God but don't go to church and have sex just once a month if over 40 – but 200 times a year during their early years of marriage. (Information kindly supplied by the Department of Trade's Adultdata survey and the Office of National Statistics).

The Blower, on the other hand, was a favoured tool of the Bentley Boys who lived in Belgravia or in stately piles in Surrey, drank Veuve Clicquot, never visited Swindon, died young (and

often spectacularly) and, although there are no statistics to support this, were playboys and probably enjoyed active sex lives.

Excitement, however, is not a universally loved quality, as Toyota's engineering department – who must studiously research the law of averages – clearly realise. I don't know about you, but I don't always want excitement when driving: palms sweating, heart racing, adrenaline pumping, blood curdling and fingers twitching. For those happy to put on Planet Rock – or more likely Radio 2 – as they drive from Swindon ferrying their 1.8 children to the airport to catch the EasyJet to Alicante, an Avensis is just fine, thank you.

I've always liked Toyota. My first car was a '70s Celica – 'the Japanese Mustang' – bought (in Australia) because it was pretty, cheap and had two doors. Earlier, I towed my first single-seat racing car with my dad's FJ40 Land Cruiser. That early Cruiser remains one of the world's best go-anywhere vehicles, and almost certainly the toughest.

Sadly, Toyota no longer makes a car as pretty as the Mk1 Celica or as characterful as the old FJ Cruiser. The Avensis, ironically, looks like every other car on the road yet – when you examine it closely – like no other Toyota. This is because Toyota has no 'design DNA'. Its designs are as ever-changing as David Beckham's hairdo, but without the style. Its design language floats, without direction, like a cherry blossom in a spring breeze, and is frequently as ephemeral.

Though anonymous of style, they are often innovative in substance. The Prius pioneered hybrids. The Lexus LS400 instantly leapfrogged 'the best car in the world' (Merc S-class) in refinement and quality, an extraordinary achievement. The RAV4 was the first compact crossover SUV, delightfully small in its original guise, sadly boated in subsequent iterations. Or take the first highly entertaining MR2, also debased as it evolved, gaining heft and losing agility.

My month also included driving the new Mazda MX-5. Here, happily, is one car that carries forward its original Mk1 charm, uncorrupted by modern day obesity and some regrettable engineering trends. Light, small and rear-drive – so that's the three key 'fun to drive' engineering qualities ticked – it is also naturally aspirated, so no turbo lag to deaden the driving joy. It's a car that mingles excitement and usability, although in no way is it aimed at Mr Average or at a Bentley Boy who'd no doubt be a bit snuffy at the low price and the effortless way it drives. .

@greenofrichmond

Former CAR editor Gavin is an undyingly passionate and knowledgeable car bloke who, as you can see, has eclectic taste, and a hairdo that in no way reminds us of David Beckham



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Mark Walton

THE INCURABLE ENTHUSIAST

'Would Nuvolari, Clark and Senna beat Fangio in identical cars? We'd need to exhume them too'



JUAN MANUEL FANGIO is definitely dead. This indisputable fact was confirmed last month when the poor old five-time world champion was dug up and wheeled out of the family crypt in his hometown of Balcarce, Argentina. The legend lives on, perhaps, but the authorities have confirmed that

Fangio himself is still very much deceased, and lying in the box he was placed in back in 1995.

Fangio was dug up because two men in their 70s say that he was their father, and after a long-running paternity battle an Argentinian judge finally ordered the world champion's body be taken out of the cemetery and sent down the morgue for a DNA sample to be taken. The results will be known in a month or so.

Fangio never married, but he always had a glamorous girl on his arm, so it's not impossible that there were going to be one or two – or perhaps a whole pit crew – of little Juan Manuels running around. And there are family resemblances: one of the men involved in the paternity claim, Oscar Espinoza, was an F2 driver for a while, racing under the name 'Cacho Fangio' (he says he always knew the great man was his dad); the other, Ruben Vazquez, never raced, but he is a dead-ringer for the deceased champion.

The men say they don't want money, they just want answers, but a morbid, disrespectful part of me wonders if this isn't a opportunity for something else, too. A little experiment.

So I'll come right out and say it: cloning.

Come on, admit it: race fans have always argued about who's the best driver of all time – you know, 'was it Fangio, Clark, Senna, or Schumacher' etc. And that debate has always been impossible to resolve, because each generation of driver needs different skills – Fangio drove big, heavy front-engined Mercs and Maseratis, Clark drove featherweight mid-engined Lotuses, Senna manhandled 1500bhp turbo McLaren-Hondas.

But imagine, for a moment, if we could

really find out; imagine if Fangio – the actual Fangio – could go head-to-head with Hamilton and Vettel! In the same cars, on the same track! Now THAT is a race I'd stay awake for, perhaps even all Sunday afternoon till 4pm.

My plan is not without its difficulties: putting aside the complex legal and moral questions of using Fangio's DNA in this way; and the undoubted howls of protest from the Fangio Foundation, and the family (which may be about to get bigger); plus the scientific challenges of cloning a human being from tissue that's been dead for 20 years – putting these issues aside, there's also the problem that a New Fangio, born in 2016, wouldn't be ready to

race for at least 20 years. In fact, in order for him to live the Original Fangio's life, his first Grand Prix wouldn't come till he reaches 37 (Fangio was a late starter), and he'd be in his prime in his 40s. By which time Lewis Hamilton will be 70.

Clearly there's an answer to this. We have to take Lewis Hamilton's DNA too, as well as Vettel's and Alonso's, so we can start preparing now for the unmissable Battle Royale that will be the 2055 F1 World Championship. (Max Verstappen will be okay, he'll still only be 23.)

To truly nail all those 'best driver' debates, though, we can't stop there. What about Nuvolari, Clark and Senna? Would they beat Fangio in identical machinery? We'd need to exhume them too. Jackie Stewart, we could just write him a polite letter.

Picture it: it's the year 2055, and we're in Melbourne for the start of the new season. Bernie Ecclestone, aged 124 and still in charge of Formula 1, would be doing the pit walk with Martin Brundle (cloned). There's Fangio, squeezed into his size XXXL race suit, lining up in the Silver Arrows with Lewis Hamilton; behind him there's Vettel and Schumacher in the Ferraris; then Senna and James Hunt enjoying a little laugh before they climb into the two McLarens. They're best pals. Then in the Lotuses there's Jim Clark and his team-mate Pastor Maldonado (after winning four world titles, Maldonado contributed his DNA on his retirement in 2021). It would be a season of epic awesomeness.

And who would win? I'll leave you to debate that.

@markwalton_

Mark's original slant on car stuff has been lighting up these pages for decades. He's got us thinking about the merits of cloning great columnists...



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25 British cars to drive before you die – from our September issue

Brit car bucket list validates our love of Lotus

► VIA EMAIL

Your 25 British Cars to Drive Before You Die cover story (CAR, September) was a corker. I was going to suggest a few cars that should have been included, but realised that none of those you did include would deserve to be left out. With six Lotuses (if you include Carlton and Cortina – seven if you include the Caterham) on the list it just goes to show how much of our sports car DNA is owed to that oft maligned Norfolk outfit, and indeed to Colin Chapman. Maybe it should have been 50 British Cars to Drive Before You Die? Or just 25 Lotuses?

Callum Craig

The Boxster position

► VIA EMAIL

I saw your article on the Porsche 981.2 (CAR, August) and was interested in your comments regarding a possible rebranding and repositioning of the car. In my opinion changing the name to 717 would be a mistake, certainly at this time. With mainstream 911s now adopting turbo power and Porsche keen to stress it will be 'power upsizing, not downsizing' then subsequently renaming their junior sportscar would send out an inconsistent message. With both models switching to forced induction within a year of each other the smart move would be to stress that 'power upsizing' is the right message for them both. Changing to 717 alongside turbos suggests that newer isn't necessarily better. Plenty of time to consider rebranding when the next-gen car arrives in a few years' time.

The same is true for altering the current pricing strategy of charging a premium for Cayman. Keep it in place – along with the 10bhp uplift – until we see new bodies, then decide. If Porsche is keen on flipping

How to have your say:



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the heirarchy between Boxster and Cayman then don't scrap a two-decade-old nameplate – other manufacturers would kill for a name as widely recognised as Boxster. When the new car arrives (982?) why not adopt the 911 strategy and call both cars Boxster. Boxster coupe (nee Cayman) sitting below Boxster cabrio. This has got to be better than calling the new car after an old Boeing airliner. Although by a strange quirk of fate those planes had their engines at the back, just like a 911!

Mike Spencer

British compromise

► VIA EMAIL

Reading the M3 report and the article on the new XF (CAR, September) I had a thought that maybe it would be interesting to do a new vs old comparison. Also, when the inevitable Giant Test of the new XF and ageing 5-series, E-class and A6 takes place, I implore the testers to fill the Jag to the brim and listen for the erroneously described 'tank slap' which featured in the two XFs I had. The last one replaced the

first one and it was still affected. Jaguar issued a technical services bulletin to try to solve the issue. This involved sticking some felt pads between the tank and the rear seats. Very British Leyland. For me, that is the problem with some 'British' cars. There is always a problem somewhere that spoils the fun. I wish Jaguar well, but it's always a compromise buying British.

Phil Taylor

On the new Ferrari Dino

► VIA FACEBOOK

Ferrari shouldn't be re-using the Dino name for a new sports car (CAR, September). It's done its time and has a pedigree classic background. Please don't try and rewrite it now, Maranello!

James Semken



The wrong Quandt?

► VIA EMAIL

The reworked GBU makes an interesting read (as does the rest of the magazine). I spotted a mistake though. I refer to your verdict on the Infiniti Q70: 'worth considering over a 5-series only if Harald Quandt ran off with your wife'. Aside from the fact that Harald died in 1967, which makes it kinda hard to run off with him, *his* products were industrial robots (later KUKA) and military technology – he wasn't the Quandt who was into cars. Herbert's the guy you were thinking of, and since he's also been dead since 1982 you may think of updating that name to Stefan. He's (hopefully) got a lot of years left.

Rainer Wargitsch

Bentley boys: a defence

► VIA EMAIL

Nice of Phil Taylor (*CAR*, September) to defend the Rooneys and Beckhams and their unpublicised charity work (who knew?) but I'm not sure the Bentley Boys would have 'sneered' at their hard work. Most served their country with honour in WW1, when none of their inherited wealth would have protected them. And they were an eclectic group, including a jockey, diamond heir, baronet, doctor, aviator, pro driver – dash it, they even welcomed a motoring journalist (Sammy Davis). Yes, they liked to party but to dismiss them as 'super rich piss-head toffs' is a long way wide of the mark.

Nick Swallow

On Jaguar's F-Pace

► VIA CAR ONLINE

Will Jaguar ever just launch a car and put it on sale? The F-Pace has been around forever in endless concepts and teasers, yet it



Aston boss Palmer in our August issue. Is Vulcan the name of the car or the planet he's on?

still won't be in the showrooms until 2016, and that probably means September 2016. The XE now looks as though it's well past its expected facelift date and it only went on sale in May!

rickerbyct

This exciting future

► VIA EMAIL

As an avid fan of *CAR* for some 30 years, I would like to offer my optimistic view on the future impact of technology on us as car enthusiasts. The proportion of the world's population living in cities is increasing, and surely this suits electric vehicles perfectly? Autonomous vehicles will remove the majority of tired and bored drivers (who are primarily commuting or undertaking chores anyway), still leaving roads and circuits available for human drivers to experience the joy of driving for its own sake. 3D printing and nano-technologies will enable new designs and new levels of performance from advanced powertrains and exciting new materials. We should look forward to the first car designed not by a human but

Really cross about Aston Martin

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Really? The choice according to CEO Andy Palmer (*CAR*, August) is a 'bankrupt Aston Martin or a crossover' – is that our only choice? How about a car named after a Star Trek planet that only 24 people can buy and looks like the illegitimate love-child of a BMW i8 and a Dodge Viper, with a kit-car wing? Or a DB10 that looks like a Nissan Z? Or a reprise of the Lagonda from the '80s that failed huge – because somehow in 2015 that's going to be a winner? It's so depressing seeing such a vision-less CEO drive Aston into the ground. Bankruptcy #8 waiting in the wings, while jetting around the planet, living the high life instead of building a world-class sports car brand, a la McLaren. The recipe is simple: retain the current epic body styles (which everyone loves) with minor updates, add the AMG reliability, electronics and powertrains. Aston was a sports car brand that said 'speed, style and elegance'. Now it says 'confused, ugly and desperate', which is just fine for a match.com posting but not for an eminent sports car brand!

Mark Sobey

Letter of the month wins a free entry into the next supercar prize draw held by BOTB.COM, worth £25!



Let tired, bored drivers sit in autonomous pods (like these from our August issue), and leave the roads for us enthusiasts



by an artificial intelligence. Ultimately virtual reality should mean that we can experience driving in life-like simulations whether on simulated roads or in amazing new environments. In many ways, the next 30 years are going to be very exciting!

Biram Desai

What about Bristol?

► VIA CAR ONLINE

I enjoyed your '25 British cars to drive before you die' feature last month. Hard to see what to take out in its place (though personally I'd be happy to drop any SUV), but a classic V8 Bristol like the 411 would fill a small, but significant, upmarket grand tourer gap in your bucket list for me. Otherwise, it's the McLaren F1 from your shortlist.

RichardJWA

BMW M3: troubled soul

► VIA EMAIL

Your long-term report of the current turbocharged M3 made interesting reading, especially as a veiled reference, and comparison, was made to the V8-powered



M3 vs GT86 from our August issue. As ever, CAR drops ice cubes down the vest of obviousness

E92 M3. Last month's edition pitched a used E92 M3 against a new Toyota GT86. But surely the obvious comparison test has been missed? Why not do the obvious and highly relevant comparison between F-series M3/M4 and E92 M3? Are you afraid of upsetting the people who provide you with test cars? However crushingly effective the new car is, with its wall of turbo torque, it has lost the essence of M-cars, the fabulous, sonorous, razor-sharp, high-revving masterpiece of an engine. An engine which does not need synthetic engine noise through its speakers. Increased grip, improved fuel consumption (actually not that much improved) might well be impressive, but these have been achieved at a cost – the loss of the M-car soul.

Tony Braybon

#BritCarBucketList

► VIA FACEBOOK

Oh well. Of the 25 cars to drive before I die, I've achieved one. I drove a Mini in 1977. Just 24 to go and I guess, at my age, rather unachievable.

Philip Djaferis

Catch Tesla if you can

► VIA EMAIL

Loving your great magazine as always and have been a petrolhead the whole of my life until recently. My brother works in California and has recently taken delivery of a Tesla Model S. I must admit that until I had a chance to ride and then drive with my brother I was a little sceptical of all the hype about the vehicle. No more. I feel every car I drive now, including my Porsche Cayman, is a loud-mouthed dinosaur that doesn't know it's dead yet. Is this really the future? I find it utterly amazing that a car manufacturer that didn't even exist a decade ago has produced a car that is game-changing in so many ways, aside from the obvious. Other manufacturers have to play catch up.

Alex Pang



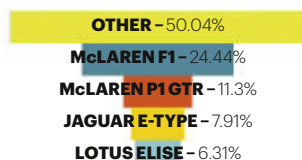
CAR ONLINE

5 most read stories on carmagazine.co.uk

- 1) Our Ferrari Dino scoop sent the page counter into turbocharged overload!
- 2) Frankfurt motor show A-Z: all the key cars from the autumn's biggest show
- 3) Big Volvos are back! We published exclusive shots of the 2016 V90/S90 twins
- 4) Honda Civic Type R vs VW Golf GTI vs Renaultsport Megane hot hatch shoot-out
- 5) Jaguar XE 2.0d 163 review: you loved our review of Jag's lower-powered 3-series rival

THE CAR POLL

Which was your favourite car from the 25 icons featured in our British cars bucket list on last month's cover?



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Your month

The place where you let us peek into your weird and wonderful automotive lives

1

VEYRON (OR SIMILAR)

I'm on holiday in California and came across this car rental firm in Hollywood. The cars are strictly highbrow - Corvettes, Ferraris, Porsches, Maseratis and a Bugatti. Unfortunately, the rental rate was slightly more than my Kia Sedona.

PAUL SELLER

2

McLAREN AT KYALAMI

At the recent McLaren owner's track day at Kyalami race track, South Africa, two special McLarens attended - F1 and P1. The F1's design still looks fresh. Standing in the pits the P1 can be heard around the whole track!

JACO PIENAAR

3

CAR IN THE UAE

Mulling over all things CAR in the UAE before visiting Ferrari World and driving a Ferrari California on the Yas Marina circuit.

DOUG CHRISTIE-SCOTT

4

CEPHALONIAN SECRET

On holiday in Cephalonia? Try the magnificent road from outside Dilinata to Divarata. Fiesta hire car perfect for the job. 20 mins of joy.

BOB HART

5

WRX IN GREECE

My Subaru WRX STI having just arrived on Zakynthos after a 1400-mile journey. Great car for it apart from 24mpg. I'm sure the reaction of the Greeks would have been more muted if it had been a Golf R.

PHILIP JAMES

6

MX-5 DOWN UNDER

My new MX-5 running in on the Great Ocean road in Victoria, Australia. After five Elises, the super-fast soft-top is a revelation. Great ride and handling, and the 1.5 is nicely zingy too.

ROBERT MCFARLAND

7

RECOMMENDED BY CAR

An afternoon enjoying Hampshire's finest B-roads - the perfect antidote to 12 hours across France in the family saloon two days earlier. I bought the MR2 after you recommended them in May 2013's issue. Great advice, thanks!

SIMON HUTTON

8

OUR BRIDAL VAN

Here's my other love, my MX-5, acting as my wedding car and my new wife's dad's van acting as hers. She grew up with Transporters and wanted to arrive in builder style. Guess which we left the ceremony in?

WILL CHALKLEY

9

PORSCHE GT4 WITH FRIES

On taking delivery of the GT4, my son and I drove 100 miles of breathtaking roads to his favourite restaurant. We celebrated Porsche's purest driving machine with a really Happy Meal.

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Oh Porsche, what have you done?

In killing off the 911's sublime naturally aspirated flat-six, has Porsche also killed off the car's soul? 'No!' says the chief project engineer, 'and here's the ride to prove it!'

Words Georg Kacher | Photography Barry Hayden





THIS IS THE biggest moment in the 911's evolution since the water-cooled engine replaced air-cooling back in 1997. That change was mostly about noise levels, yet it sent shockwaves coursing through the 911-sphere after 34 years of air power. But the 911 survived, despite a challenging new look that made the 996 the first 911 to appear more revolution than evolution.

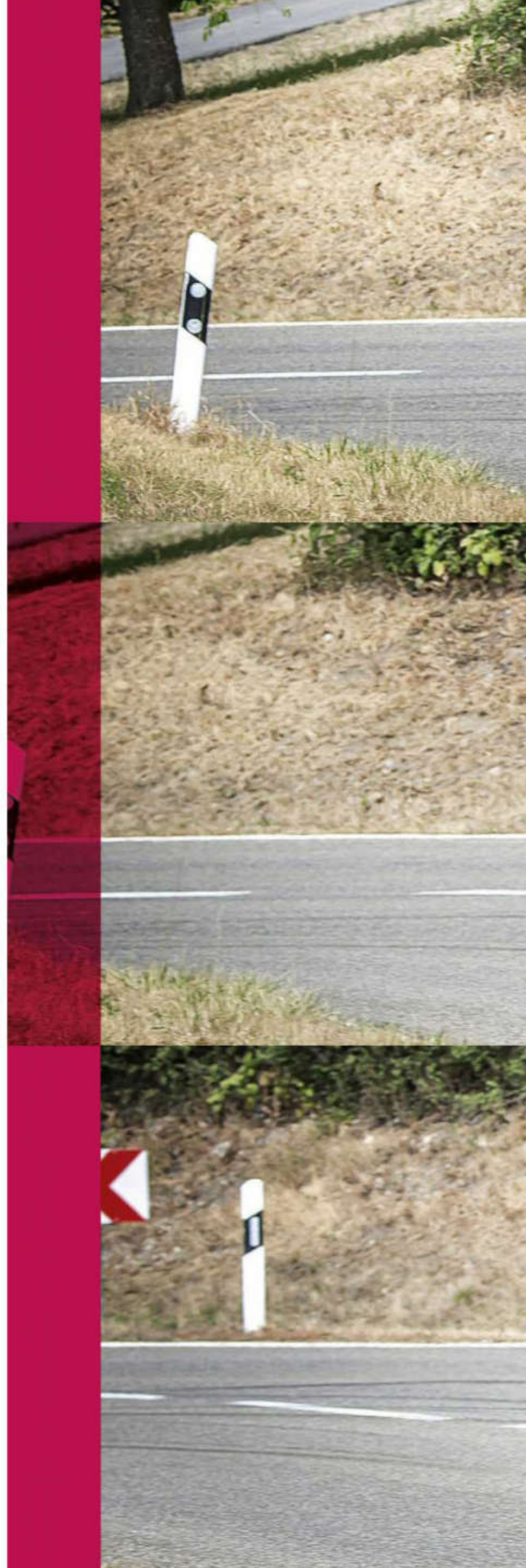
Now, as the current 991 model gets a mid-life overhaul for 2016, the change is all about efficiency – more torque from a downsized twin-turbocharged engine, less thirst, lower emissions. It's the *zeitgeist*. All Porsches (bar the GT3) will be turbocharged from now on, so we had better get used to it. But the 911's unique handling characteristics, its power delivery, its soundtrack, are delicate things. And of course the addition of all that plumbing puts onto the 911's rear axle arguably the very last thing it needed: more weight.

This is our first chance to assess the new 911's character, via a full-throttle shotgun ride in the company of 991 project boss August 'Gustl' Achleitner. And he's in determined mood...

WE SHOOT UP to the right-hander like a hungry shark aiming for its prey. Third gear, brake. Second gear, brake harder. Lift-off-and-turn-in smoothly, keep the torque flowing, then – just past the second apex – boot it! We have a drift, for one, two, three seconds, followed by a very graceful exit. 'Could you ask the photographer to send me this picture, please,' says Achleitner, with trademark dry humour.

The 991/2 may be a mid-life revision, but chief designer Michael Mauer and his team have introduced subtle changes to help us mark it out – such as LED sidelights, 3D taillights, motorised nasal air-intakes which close above 10mph and an all-black new rear air-intake with longitudinal rather than east-west slats. 'We made improvements where we felt a need for them,' says Achleitner. 'But we certainly did not mess with the character of the marque's most iconic product.'

We're spending the day in a red pre-production Carrera S. Camouflage? Two strips of body-colour tape at one end, two faux transparent taillight covers at the other. Already ▶





911 project boss August Achleitner gets his new toy out of shape with our Georg on board. 'Send me this picture!'



clearly visible are new xenons with trademark quad-dot day-time running lights, new 20in mag wheels, and the aforementioned new air-intake which now feeds the engine as well as the two intercoolers which are stowed away in the rear wings.

As before, the S moniker signals more grunt and more twist action (414bhp/369lb ft for the S, 365bhp/332lb ft for the Carrera). Originally, Porsche had contemplated equipping the base model with a 2.7-litre twin-turbo flat-six instead of the outgoing 3.4, but the consumption advantage was marginal and the added complexity would have hurt the budget. So it's a 3.0-litre twin-turbo for the C2/C2S and 4.0 litres for the future top-of-the-line turbo (what will they call that – 911 Turbo turbo?). Although both engines gain only 20bhp in absolute power and 44lb ft, it's the wide torque delta between the old and new torque curves which is claimed to make all the difference.

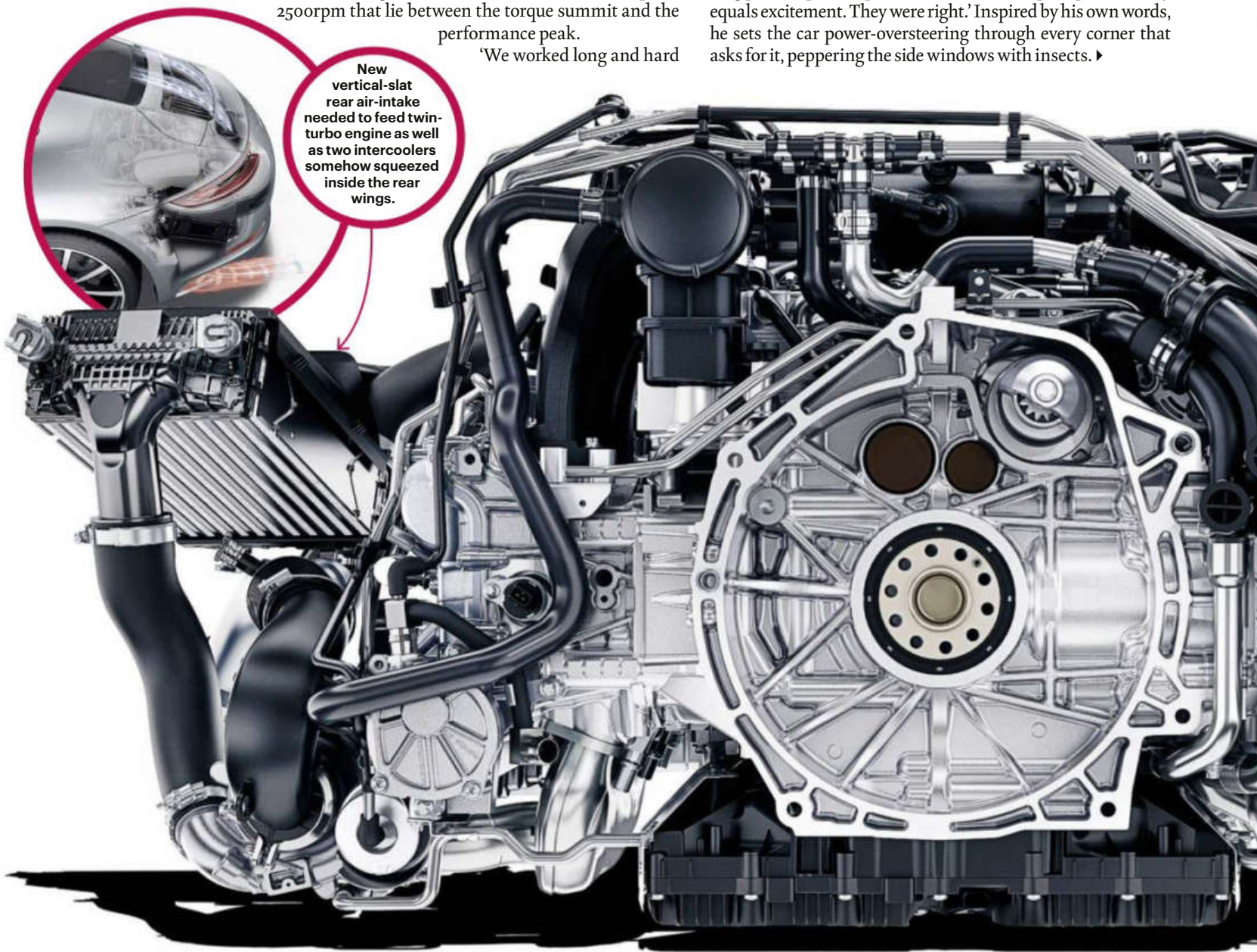
Achleitner prefers to operate his latest creation in manual mode, 'so that I'm always close to that wide sweet spot where this engine responds without delay.' *Really* without delay? From a passenger perspective, there is no turbo lag as such, but somehow the throttle action does not feel quite as electrifying as we remember it from the soon defunct GTS motor which reached its cut-out speed 500rpm later. Thanks to oodles of low-end urge, there is now no real need to tap the 2500rpm that lie between the torque summit and the performance peak.

'We worked long and hard

to make the 9A2 engines sound good, to give them a voice of their own,' says Achleitner. 'It was a difficult task, but I am happy with the result.' While the run-of-the-mill versions are said to be a little more decibel-conscious, our test car is fitted with the vocal sports exhaust which trumpets through two fat tailpipes positioned below the numberplate. In Sex Pistols mode, full acceleration makes horses prance, has birds fly up in clusters, arches the backs of resident cats.

While the turbos breathe fresh air into the combustion chambers of the Carrera motor at no more than 0.9bar, the wind force rises to 1.1bar in the S engine. Chargers, intercoolers and related gubbins put that extra weight on the rear wheels, which normally is poison for the already critical weight distribution and handling balance (the S manual is 30kg heavier than before at 1420kg). 'Not the case,' says Achleitner. 'On the contrary, the 991/2 feels even more relaxed at speed, the front axle in particular is firmly planted, and there is a new quality to the overall compliance.' Gustl sets the drive programme in Sport, pushes the PSM stability button and cracks a grin. 'We developed a slide-without-regret mode which permits astonishing drift angles yet prevents you reliably from ending up in the ditch. It's a software thing supported by rear-wheel steering which can now be specified for the Carrera S.' After a long pause, a postscript: 'Someone said that speed plus stability equals excitement. They were right.' Inspired by his own words, he sets the car power-oversteering through every corner that asks for it, peppering the side windows with insects. ▶

New vertical-slat rear air-intake needed to feed twin-turbo engine as well as two intercoolers somehow squeezed inside the rear wings.



991 vs 991.2: Spot the difference



991 Carrera S PDK (2011)

991.2 Carrera S PDK (2016)

3800cc atmo flat-six



3000cc bi-turbo flat-six
Displacement 21% smaller

32.5mpg



36.5mpg +12%

4.1sec

0-62 MPH → 3.9sec

TOP SPEED

189mph 191mph

PEAK POWER

394bhp @
7400rpm

414bhp @
6500rpm



PEAK TORQUE

324lb ft @
5600rpm

369lb ft @
1700-5000rpm



7:40

NORBSCHLEIFE TIME

7:30

3.0-litre twin-turbo flat-six is a completely new engine. Maximum torque is available all the way from 1700rpm to 5000, creating more performance lower down and reducing fuel consumption. Red line at 7500rpm rarely needed.

Smaller capacity key to enhanced efficiency. Carrera S engine is 800cc smaller than before, yet generates 20bhp and 44lb ft more. Turbos force air into the combustion chambers at 0.9bar (1.1 in Carrera S).



Achleitner (left) with Kacher. 'We worked hard to make the engine sound good'





Fear not, that distinct willingness to burn rubber and peel tarmac has been retained and refined



Steering wheel based on 918 Spyder takes on more functions and lowers the button count elsewhere. New nav screen arrives in 21st century at last



The PDK-equipped 414bhp version can hit 62mph in 3.9sec, eclipsing its predecessor by 0.2sec and becoming the first Carrera to dip below the 4.0sec mark. But, while the top speed climbs by a token 2mph in both models, the big news is that fuel consumption drops by between 6% and 13%. In the case of the Carrera S it improves from 32.5mpg to 36.5mpg, and CO₂ is down from 202g/km to an astonishing 174.

The 991/2 is a multi-talented, multi-tasking sports car. Among the new skills it acquires is waftability. Thanks to the long-legged top gear, the black box's strong desire to cut revs in Drive, and the ability to coast under trailing throttle, this Porsche is a remarkably relaxed on-demand cross-country cruiser. But fear not, that distinct willingness to burn rubber and peel tarmac has been retained and refined – and pleasingly they've made it easier to access the dark side of the car's character by fitting a mode dial to the new sports steering-wheel, 918-style (and Ferrari-manettino-style). There are five different attitudes to choose from: Normal, Individual, Sport, Sport Plus and Sport Response which is clearly tuned for track use only. The rotary control conducts the performance of drivetrain, dampers, rear air dam and exhaust. The choice is between comfort and sport, and you may mix and match your favourite traits and store them under Individual. Although this is clearly a step in the right direction, we would prefer to access engine and transmission separately. Why? Because there is no need to mate a very fast throttle response to an unsuitably low gear and correspondingly high revs.

Just as my stomach pit is about to make an emergency call, Gustl slows down, turns off and heads for the *Pforzheim* basin. Rounding up his new favourite ram with two fingers and a ginger right foot, he aims at every drainage grid and manhole cover. 'What do you think? Can you feel the difference? We reprogrammed the PASM software, and this is the result: better low-speed ride, more progressive response, decent compliance even with 20in tyres. Worth mentioning in this context is the available front-axle lift which adds 30mm of ground clearance for steep ramps and tall kerbs.' Unfortunately, this particular extra costs about as much as a dozen replacement aprons. Absolutely free of charge are the more ►

Carrera now gets GT3's rear-wheel steering, sharpening turn-in and aiding high-speed stability. Porsche Active Suspension Management (PASM) now standard, lowering ride height by 10mm. Rear wheels 0.5in wider.

New manettino-style mode selector includes Sport Response, which puts the car into maximum attack mode for 20sec





Georg tries the cabrio's driving seat. Never has a right foot been this twitchy



Infotainment stars Apple CarPlay, Google Earth, voice control and ace new touchscreen

slippery aerodynamics which provide more downforce at speed while improving the drag coefficient.

During our excursion through Swabian suburbia, there is plenty of time to check out the upgraded infotainment. The centre console itself has not changed much, but the new in-dash monitor offers better graphics and additional features such as Apple CarPlay and Google Earth. You can also go online, have messages read out to you, hop on Facebook, check out the weather and benefit from RTTI which is so much faster than yesterday's old-school traffic news. Dubbed PCM4, the revised set-up boasts a smartphone-like touchscreen with swipe and zoom and scroll functions. Proximity sensors enlarge your fingertip's icon of desire. Together with the mode switch, PCM4 marks an important step towards an all-new MMI system which will likely be launched in about four years' time together with the 992. Which is another way of saying that 911 customers must wait until 2019 for a head-up display, additional assistance systems and the increasingly significant plug-in hybrid.

The new car is already on sale in the UK, although deliveries won't start until December. Prices are modestly up, but then so is standard equipment. Carrera coupe will cost £76,412 (up from £73,509), but gets sat-nav and PASM. Carrera S will start at £85,857 (was £83,545). The new Carrera cabrio is £85,253, with the S cab set at £94,698. The most expensive options are again carbon-ceramic brakes and the PDK 'box. The manual seven-speeder, which was to be avoided at all costs when the 991 was first released, receives various upgrades, including a double-plate clutch for more precision and less effort.

Change of pace, one more time. After country roads and city traffic, we are now heading for the A8 autobahn, direction *Karlsruhe*. Almost automatically, my driver morphs into cloak-and-dagger mode, pulling down his Zorro mask and giving it enough stick to allow me to figure out what this new engine really sounds like. Initially, full throttle feels like departing from the launch pad of an aircraft carrier, but after a while one gets used to the trademark kick-and-rush rhythm, the extrovert racing up the shrill tone-ladder, the intermittent bass-heavy lift-off jam session. It's a nice noise – I like it. But it is different to the naturally aspirated engine – more techno than orchestra, more dense, with more nuances within a narrower acoustic frame. Do you know what it is – it's modern. It's the sound of the immediate future. I'm fairly certain we will grow to embrace it.

Against the inner stopwatch, however, the 991/2 feels barely faster than the more raucous, rev-hungry previous model. What puts the new car in a league of its own are the meatier low-to-mid-range punch and the greater forward urgency in seventh gear. But let's for a moment forget about sheer velocity in a straight line. Let's instead relish the confidence-inspiring directional stability, the securely tied-down front end, the immunity to that once highly critical mix of radius, rut, ridge and high speed. All of which helped this 911 to shave 10 whole seconds off the previous Carrera's best Nordschleife lap time, posting 7min 30sec.

Dopey trucker with rear-view mirror allergy? Indicator-lazy sales rep in text-messaging trance? 60bhp-grandma on a fast-lane trip? No problem when you're at the helm of the new Carrera S, which decelerates with vitriolic spontaneity, punching you in the head and simultaneously straining the neck muscles. Still on the credit side, the Porsche's ability to follow a chosen line does not suffer when you must suddenly sway and swerve, changing lanes, braking hard.

The second time we exceed an indicated 170mph, a warning beep recommends to check the tyre pressures. For the first time, Gustl Achleitner blushes. 'Instead of the high-performance setting, I chose the lower-pressure mode because it cushions the ride by a fraction,' he says. 'In combination with the softer front anti-roll bar, the suspension is now also less susceptible to lateral irritations and better balanced overall. Even a lift-off manoeuvre at 180mph will do no harm.' Much too soon, LB-GA 1180 approaches the *Heimsheim* exit. At the lights, we turn right and storm up the hill, direction *Weissach*. One more chance to high-five the limiter at 7500rpm, to let my broad back cushion the full-throttle upshift kicks, to boo the fake double-declutch as we slow down for the main gate. Game over. Driver change? Sadly, not until the official launch in November. Until then there's only one answer to 'Oh Porsche, what have you done?' Porsche done good. 📺

It's a nice noise – I like it. But it is different to the naturally aspirated engine. Do you know what it is – it's modern



Red car is wearing light disguise (check out those fake rear lamps) but silver car the real deal. Motorised nasal air-intakes close above 10mph



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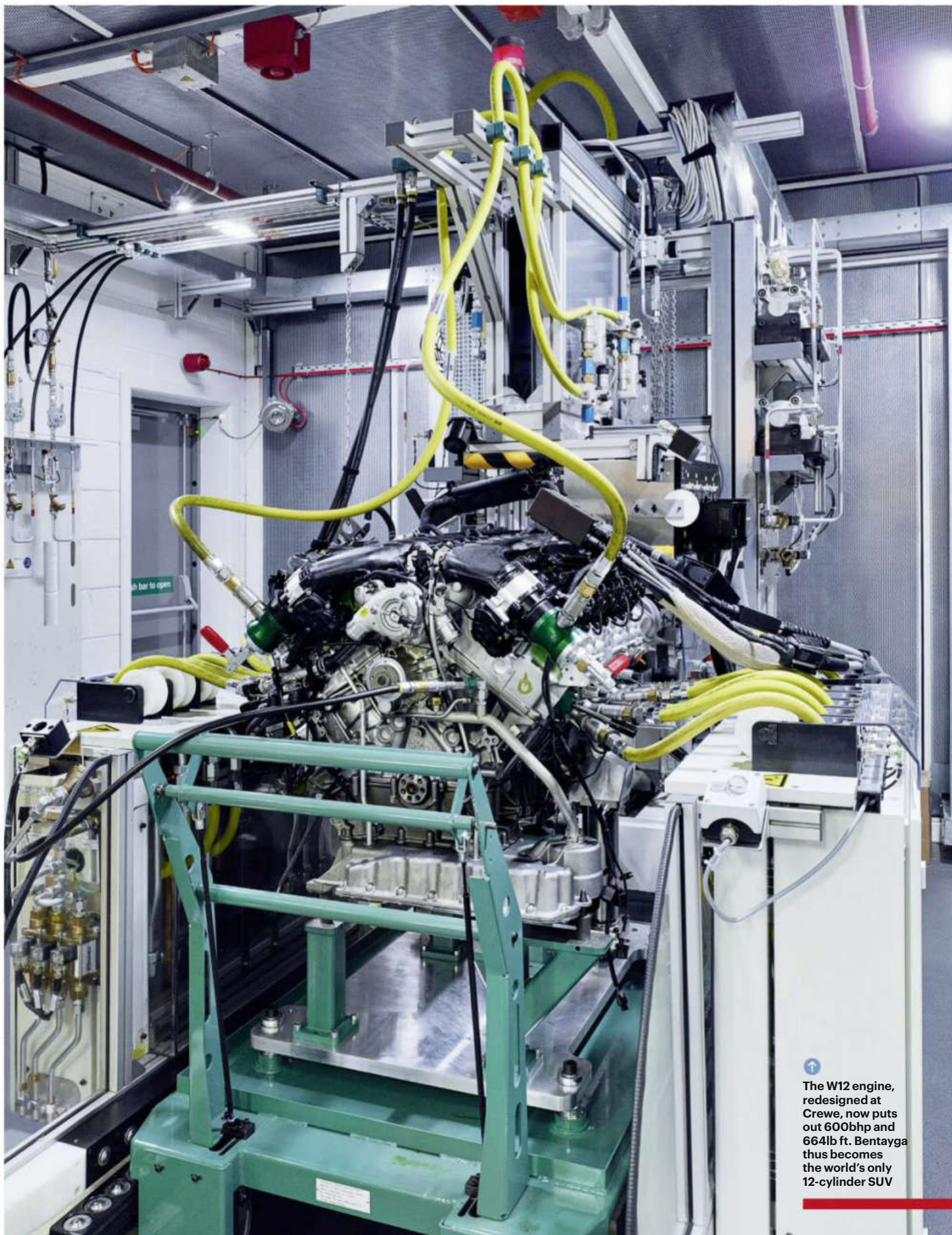
[car **INSIDE:** BENTLEY HQ]

Where they're building the future by hand

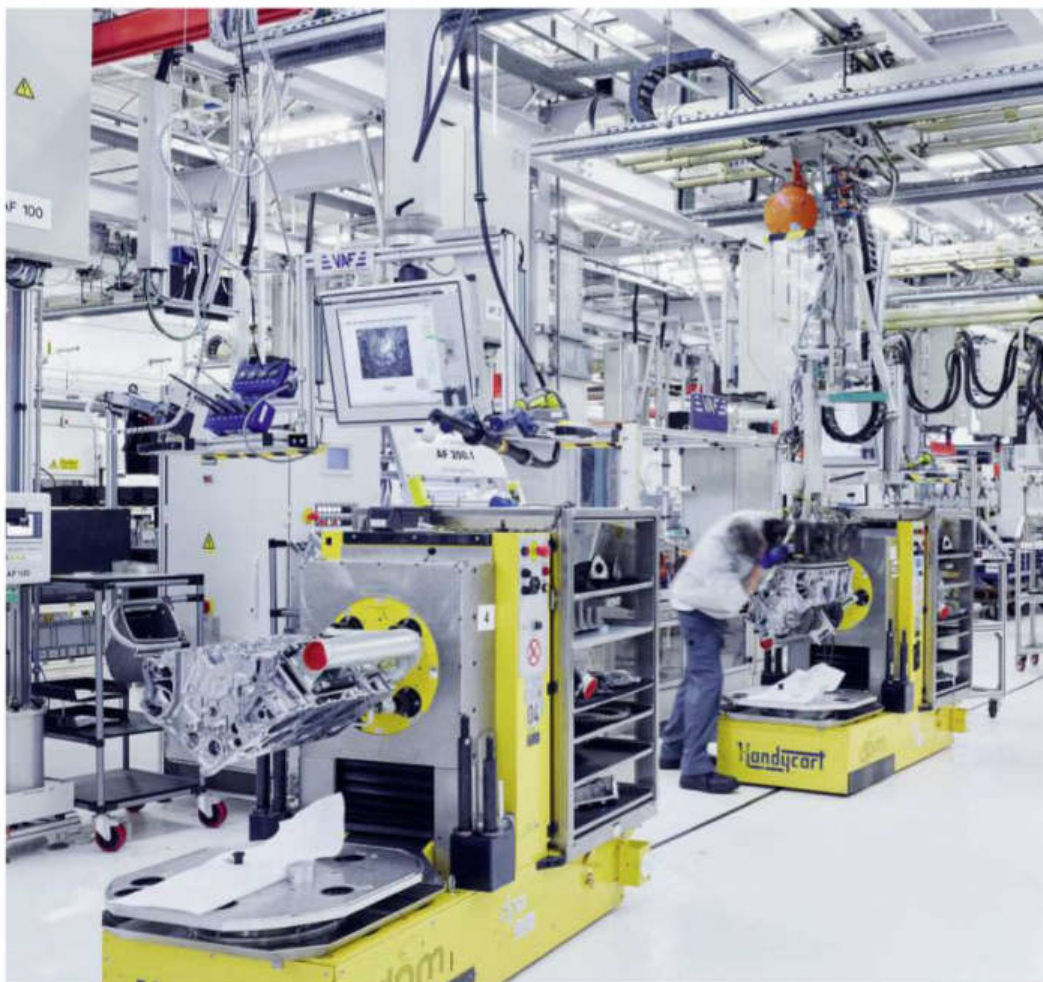


In the old brick buildings that assembled the Rolls-Royce Merlin engines which powered Spitfires to World War Two glory, they're creating the biggest, fastest, most luxurious SUV yet: Bentayga. We have exclusive access to the car, and the craftsmen making it

Words Gavin Green | Photography Greg White



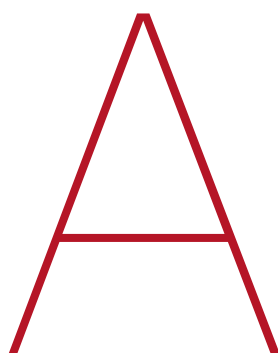
The W12 engine, redesigned at Crewe, now puts out 600bhp and 664lb ft. Bentleyga thus becomes the world's only 12-cylinder SUV



So, you look up from stitching your steering wheel (which takes five hours) and you see the clock. Still feeling focused?



W12s on their way down the line. This is the slowest they'll ever travel



T ONE STAGE it seemed probable that the new Bentley Bentayga would be built far away in Bratislava. To many top managers in the Volkswagen Group's Wolfsburg HQ, the Slovakian plant made good sense. Are not all the group's other large SUVs – from Cayenne to Q7 to Touareg – all built in this state-of-the-art plant, where the buildings are new and the labour rate is less than half that of the

UK's? (Ironically, at the same time the Bentayga is launched, Jaguar Land Rover announces it will build cars in Slovakia, no doubt attracted by the combination of high tech and low cost.)

So the Bentayga very nearly became the first Bentley built outside the UK. In the end, common sense – and a dash of Bentley's never-ending obsession with heritage – prevailed. The old Crewe factory was reconfigured (at a cost of £115 million) and Bentayga came to Britain. David Cameron even ventured up north to make the happy announcement, standing alongside all the smiling umlauts on Bentley's German-dominated management board.

And it's quite a car. The name is curious and strangely contrived, for a company that so clearly values authenticity; it's also an odd departure from mellifluous and history-imbued badges such as Continental GT, Mulsanne and Arnage. You'll recall the first prototype, shown at Geneva more than three years ago, was also not well received, a vast, vulgar, glitzy bling barge, clearly aimed at flaunting oligarchs and showy Sheiks.

Well, the production car is no beauty but it's a whole lot

easier on the eye than that unsightly EXP9F concept. We find a typically big and bluff Bentley nose – a chromed White Cliffe of Dover and a clear warning to slower cars to vacate the fast lane, and pronto. We find appealing Bentley-style hips, chunky shoulders, vast bonnet (accommodating an equally vast 12-cylinder engine) and a long rear overhang, for a sportier and more streamlined stance. As an SUV, it is a two-box car, a Bentley first. It's the first Bentley with a tailgate.

As a Bentley, it also subscribes to Oscar Wilde's philosophy that nothing succeeds like excess. It's the fastest, most luxurious, most expensive, most powerful and most exclusive production SUV in the world. Project director Peter Guest says it's the first of a new breed of car, the ultra-luxury SUV, as Bentley tries to position the Bentayga north of the poshest Range Rover and Cayenne. Lamborghini and Rolls-Royce, we now know, will follow into this rarefied market, diamonds in the rough.

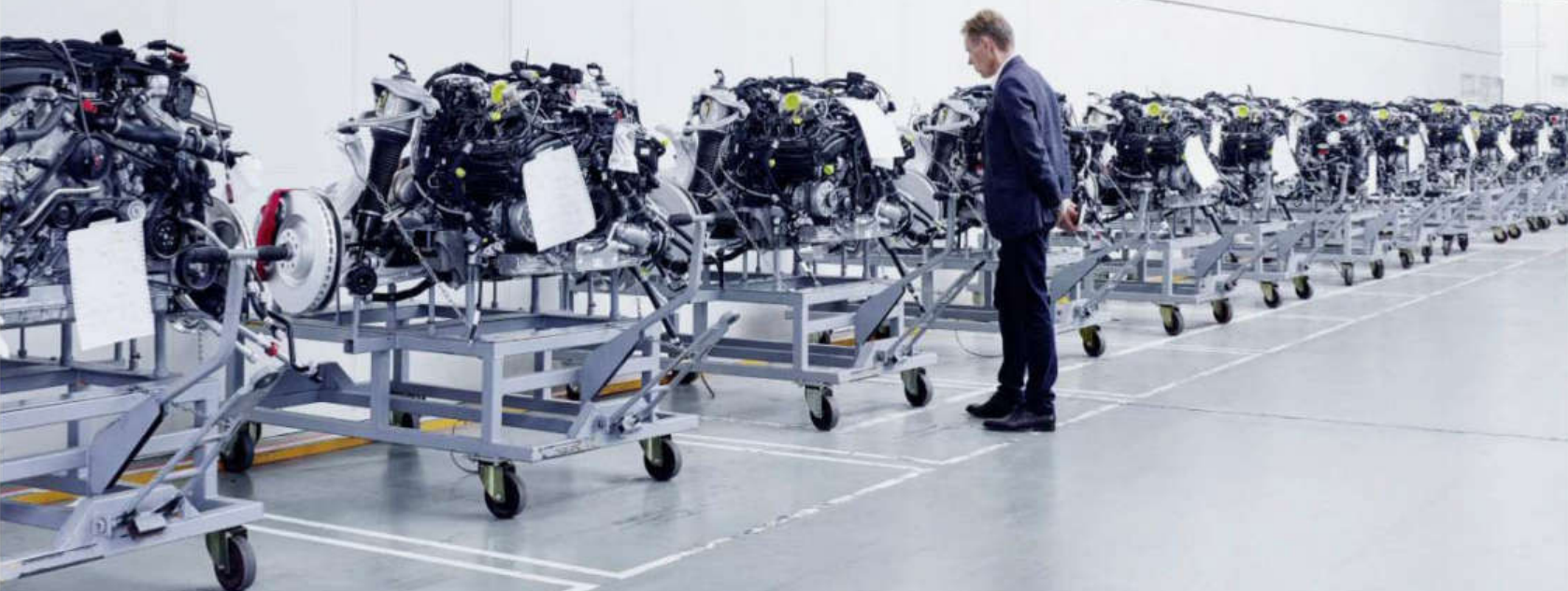
The Bentayga will be priced at £160,200, or at \$185,000 in its biggest market, the USA. It's the world's only 12-cylinder SUV, good for 600bhp, and a massive 664lb ft of torque. The W12 engine is, surprisingly, all new – lighter and more efficient than the current W12 which, for the time being, continues to provide service in Continentals and the priciest Audis.

That new W12 is hand-assembled in Crewe (like the old ▶

The engine Built in 264mins

The W12 engine has been totally redesigned for the Bentayga and all major components – including block and heads – are new. It's 26kg lighter, and has 10% lower CO2 emissions. Unusually, it has both direct and indirect port fuel-injection to improve efficiency, throttle response and emissions. Fuel-injection pressure is much higher, further improving efficiency. Eleven people work on the engine assembly line, one per station – and the engine goes through 11 stations, spending 24 minutes at each assembly point. Most components are fitted by hand, including pistons, valves and camshafts. The W12's big advantage over a V12 is that it's 25% shorter. It is largely designed and engineered in Crewe, by Bentley's burgeoning engineering team, although nearly all big components – including aluminium castings for block and heads, and the turbos – come from Germany. The V8s used in some Continentals – due to appear in future Bentaygas – are Audi designed, and come from Hungary.

**Eleven people work
on the engine line,
one per station. The
engine spends 24
minutes at each**



↑
Our man Gavin
inspects the W12
engine line at
Crewe. Every one
assembled by hand



If you can't tell your burr walnut from your fiddleback eucalyptus you'll never make it in veneers



Hides are closely inspected for flaws, and marked up. 40% of every hide is discarded



The veneer 50 cars per tree

The wood veneers come from around the world: walnut from Californian orchards, fiddleback eucalyptus from Spain, tamo ash from China, and more. Seven different types of veneer are offered on the Bentayga at launch, and more are likely to follow. Walnut is likely to constitute 60% of demand; it's also the most popular wood in other Bentley models. The burr walnut comes from the root balls of old trees, cut into thin veneers: 24 sheaths are used per car, always in a 'mirror image' (to give a completely symmetrical look to the cabin), and always

from the same tree. One tree will trim about 50 cars.

Bentley specialists visit wood suppliers from around the world – typically in Valencia, Milan and London – selecting the very best veneers, and every 18 months or so they'll introduce a new one. The veneers are cut by laser and – unlike the wood used by many rivals – are never bleached or stained. One change for the Bentayga is the use of ovens to cure the lacquer in two hours: hitherto it took three days for natural curing. Quality of finish is unaffected, they insist.



In these old halls you see craftsmen stitching and cutting, not robots welding

The leather 100% German bull

Bentley has the best leather in the car industry, and is renowned for the quality of its craftsmanship. All hides come from southern German bulls, which are especially beefy. The hides come treated and prepared from Germany, to Crewe, where the craftsmen cut, fit and stitch them. On a Bentley 14 hides are used, compared with nine for a Continental GT and 12 for a Flying Spur. The craftsmen closely inspect the hides by hand and eye, marking imperfections before they're machine-cut to a range of patterns. Only about 60% of the hide is deemed good enough for use in a car.

There are 18 different hues of leather – more if you want to go down the Mulliner bespoke route. After the Bentley goes into full production, Bentley will use about 5000 hides a week – almost double current demand. The stitching of the leather is done partly by machine, and sometimes by hand. Bentley designs and makes its own seats – unusual in the car industry.



W12), and is clearly the prime source of the Bentley's domineering performance. Its other clear area of leadership – not surprising when you consider the price – is its craftsmanship, long a Bentley speciality. Only Rolls-Royce can match Bentley's standards here. To appreciate this fully, you need to venture inside those old brick buildings in Crewe, far removed from the clinical excellence of a 'normal' mass-production car factory.

Here, where those 12-cylinder Merlin WW2 engines were made, and many generations of finely crafted Rolls-Royces and Bentleys were produced, the Bentaygas are assembled, including the hand-crafted leather and wood, the largely hand-made W12s, and final assembly of the car, including painting.

Crewe has had its ups and downs over the years but it's fair to say that the mood now at Volkswagen's north-west European outpost – VW's Winterfell – has never been more upbeat. (Ironically, Crewe was originally chosen as a factory location partly because it was a long way from Germany – so further for the Luftwaffe to fly to bomb it.) The Bentley alone creates 400 new jobs at Crewe, and almost single-handedly doubles

production. A factory built for war is now enjoying the fruits of a prosperous peace, ironically thanks to German investment. Much of its structure is still original, including the stained brick walls and much of the roof frames – pitched like a row of terrace houses to try to confuse the Germans (the Luftwaffe, not Volkswagen). There is even a vaguely old-fashioned smell of oil and grease and dust and glue and paint, with a slight whiff of leather and dried wood.

The old brick buildings give no indication of the magic wrought behind the walls. Only the occasional new Bentley parked, or driven slowly, around the warren of lanes suggests something special.

Step inside these old halls and you enter a different world of car manufacturing. You see craftsmen stitching and cutting, not robots welding; you see rows of ladies (no men!) sitting at quietly thrumming sewing machines; giant fragrant hides being inspected by expert eyes and hands; stacks of delicate thin wood veneers – exquisitely patterned – that come from California, Canada, China and Spain, laser cut but hand polished, tech meets trad. It's more like an upmarket furniture factory than a car plant.

In another building, giant Bentley frames slowly morph from Slovakian skeletons – the body's core aluminium structure comes from Bratislava, so those opportunistic Slovaks didn't totally miss out – into beautifully finished Bentleys.

There are some lovely exterior design details, proof of the fanatical attention that goes into a Bentley. My favourite are the dainty headlamp washer caps in the middle of the smaller front lights, reducing design clutter. They jump to attention when there's water to be sprayed. I also love the Winged Bs on the flanks, the 'B' graphics in the taillights and the vast sculptural (aluminium) front wings, unencumbered by shutlines around the headlamps (much harder to manufacture this way).

Though there are attractive flourishes on the exterior, the car's highlight is its cabin. Step inside a Bentley after a Q7 or a Cayenne, and it's like stepping into a palace from a

penthouse: polished, hand-crafted tradition versus precise, mass-produced technology.

There are so many delicious features, from the diamond quilted leather seats (made in-house by Bentley), the bulls-eye vents manufactured from solid aluminium, plus the three delicate rows of beautifully tactile knurling on the vent controls, gearlever and clock bezel (all real alloy, not plastic). The vent controls are organ-stop, and glide as if lubricated by oil. They slide without notch, beautifully damped. The speakers are covered in real metal fabric. There is little sign of plastic: Bentley starts with leather. A vast panoramic sunroof allows light naturally to illuminate this most splendid of SUV cockpits.

Dave Hudson, manufacturing project leader, guides us around the old Crewe buildings where the magic happens. The woodshop uses walnut from Californian orchards, chestnut from Europe, olive ash from Europe, tamo ash from China, fiddleback eucalyptus from Spain and birds-eye maple from Canada: seven different veneers are offered on the Bentley. There is more wood in a Bentley than any other Bentley, for the simple reason it has the biggest cabin. Walnut – sliced from the root balls of old fruit trees – will likely constitute 60% of sales. The wood is all hand-polished and sanded; they are never bleached or stained on a Bentley. One tree will trim 50 cars, and each car always uses wood from the same tree, for consistency.

In the adjacent leather shop Richard Priest, operations manager, tells us each Bentley uses 14 hides (a Continental GT uses nine). They are all from large southern German bulls: about 5000 hides a week will be used by Bentley in total, after the Bentley is launched. Craftsmen carefully examine each hide, cutting out the warts, boils and growth lines.

Then the serious hand labour really begins. It takes five hours to hand-stitch the leather for each steering wheel, and 37 hours to cross-stitch the seats. The diamond quilt ▶



Few car manufacturers make their own seats, but Bentley does. It takes 18 dedicated people. Remember them when you sit down



pattern is machine stitched. So is the Bentley wings motif in the seatback (it has 5498 individual stitches). The cross- and contrast-stitching are always hand-sewn; apparently the craftsmen can recognise their own work.

Bentley makes its own seats – very unusual in the car industry – and we see throne-size chairs taking shape, skinned in either diamond-quilted or straight flute upholstery, always in lustrous leather, of course. In the four-seat versions, the front and rear seats are identical.

Separately, we see a glueing machine affixing carpet to the back of the rear seats of the five-seat versions. These chairs fold forward 60:40. In effect, the Bentayga is Bentley's first hatchback, so folding rear-hatch-style seats are a novelty. This carpet-glueing technique – disappointingly automated – comes from those masters of mass manufacture at Audi. The Bentley craftsmen seem surprisingly pleased with it, a new 21st century toy in a manufacturing environment that is otherwise unrelentingly last century.

In a separate old brick structure, the W12 engines are assembled, turbochargers, camshafts, pistons, valves, fuel rails and timing covers (and many other components) all fitted by hand. Shaun McNeil, head of engines, tells us that it's 26kg lighter than the old W12: block, head, pistons and bearings are all new, so this is far more than an extensive revamp. Fuel economy and CO2 emissions, says McNeil, have improved by 10%. CO2 emissions will be 292g/km, not that too many Bentayga owners will care.

If the production process is Bentley-familiar, the segment in which it competes clearly is not. Yet, says project director Guest, Bentley expanding into SUVs was an obvious step. 'It's a fast-growing segment, most of our customers already own one [typically a Range Rover in the UK, often a Cadillac Escalade in America], and it's a strong brand fit. Put it this way: if WO could do a car today, he'd do an SUV.'

More surprising is the effort they've put into its off-road credentials. While Guest admits that 'rock crawling isn't likely', the Bentayga is designed to cope with Dubai dunes, Saharan sand, Siberian snow, Midlands mud plus rutted gravel drives on that bumpy journey to the front door of your New England log cabin or your out-of-Moscow dacha.

Bentley's new Drive Dynamics control – like Land Rover's Terrain Response but with added programmes – gives eight choices, to provide ideal performance either on- or off-road. In the rough, we find programmes for sand, mud and ruts, gravel, plus snow and grass. A top-view camera helps the driver become his own off-road spotter. On the ▶

Steering wheel on its rig, complete with myriad reels of thread. Tell Albert to get a wriggle on, there's another 5000 of these to do



The cabin Posher than posh

The Bentayga's cabin is the most luxurious ever found on an SUV, perhaps not surprising at £160,200. Leather and wood is used throughout for the trim, and when you see silver it's nearly always real alloy, not plastic. The vents, for instance, are milled from solid aluminium. Specially delightful touches include the precise triple-row knurling around the bullseye vents, clock bezel and gearlever. The air vents, in time-honoured Bentley practice, are organ-stop controlled, and slide as though in oil. The steering wheels are all hand-stitched, in one of the most time-consuming parts of the assembly: each wheel takes five hours to swathe with leather. Elsewhere, stitching is sometimes done by machine, sometimes by hand. The cross- and contrast-stitching is always hand done, and apparently individual craftsmen can recognise their own work. Diamond quilt upholstery – machine stitched – is standard on the Bentayga, though straight fluting is also available. 'Comfort' and 'Sports' seats are offered. Eighteen people hand-build the Bentayga's seats.



A high-quality photograph of the interior of a Bentley SUV, viewed from the driver's perspective. The dashboard features three large circular air vents and a central infotainment screen displaying 'All-Terrain' and 'Bluetooth'. The steering wheel is two-spoke with a white leather center and a brown leather outer ring, featuring the Bentley logo. The center console has a gear shifter with a 'P' indicator and handbrake. The seats are upholstered in a combination of white perforated leather and orangey-brown leather. The overall aesthetic is one of luxury and craftsmanship.

**'It's a strong brand fit.
Put it this way: if WO
could do a car today,
he'd do an SUV'**

With this much sumptuous leather it's fairly crucial to get the colour choice right. Orangey rusty brown arguably a no-no

Guest admits it can't compete with a Range Rover off-road. 'That wasn't our goal'





The Bentayga

It's a plastic grille?

After painting, the Bentayga is inspected for any flaws. The exterior design DNA is very Bentley, from upright 'chrome' grille (made from plastic, slightly disappointingly – it's better for pedestrian protection) to chunky shoulders to the big squared haunches. Note central 'caps' in smaller headlamps – these are the integrated washers, a really nice design detail. The headlamps are LED matrix beam, a technology first shown in latest Audi A8. Note also bumperless nose, for a cleaner style.

The body is all aluminium, as is nearly all the chassis (like a Range Rover), bonded, riveted and with some welding. This gave a 250kg weight saving over an equivalent size steel body. There are some borrowings from the Audi Q7/VW Group SUV platform, but mostly Bentayga is bespoke. Bodies come from same Slovakian factory as Q7 and Cayenne to Crewe for final assembly. Three wheel sizes are offered, the biggest 22in for road use. Surprisingly, Bentayga has been engineered for real off-roading, when fitted with smaller wheels. Bentley's version of Land Rover's Terrain Response – Drive Dynamics – has four off-road settings.



Sculpted wings have no shutline around the headlamps. Hard to make!


tarmac – where the Bentayga will clearly spend most of its life – we find settings to optimise performance or comfort, plus an all-encompassing 'Bentley' mode (which Guest recommends for day-to-day use) and a customised setting, to enable you to mix and match (sharper throttle, softer damping, for example).

Air springs are standard and there are four ride heights, including a 'kneel' setting to make getting in and out easier. You can also dip the rear while maintaining front ride height, all the better for hitching that horsebox. It's a practical car as well as a posh one: towing capacity is 3.5 tonnes.

The four-wheel-drive system is fully mechanical, runs full-time, and is similar to that in the latest Audi Q7. It's mated to an eight-speed ZF gearbox, with central Torsen diff. A low-range system, as on a Range Rover, was considered but rejected, partly because of the weight (and, I suspect, the unlikelihood that a customer would ever use it). 'To be honest, the car doesn't need it,' Guest tells me. 'The W12 has so much torque, it's simply unnecessary.' Diff locks, equally, were considered and rejected. 'With modern electronics, they're not needed.'

As proof of its substantial off-roading credentials, the Bentayga can wade to a depth of 500mm. Guest admits it can't compete with a Range Rover off-road. 'That wasn't our goal: substantial all-terrain capability was.' A Rangie can wade to a boat-like 900mm, and also has superior approach and departure angles, due to shorter overhangs, especially at the rear.

Rather, it's in on-road performance that the Bentayga can trump all. With a 600bhp engine, a chassis tagged 'Bentley Dynamic Ride' (powered by a mighty 48-volt system complete with electrically adjustable anti-roll control to combine vertical suppleness and lateral stiffness) plus a Range Rover-like all-aluminium body and chassis to cut weight (the target is a Range Rover-like 2400kg), the Bentayga should perform like no SUV before or since: Lambo meets Landie. Maximum speed is an astonishing 187mph and the 0-62 dash is covered in 4.1 fast-moving seconds.

Finally, let us return to those hallowed halls, built on a former potato field, to make aero engines to defend the realm. Though 'made in Crewe', most of the major mechanical components that constitute a Bentayga actually come from Germany. This includes block, heads and crankshaft. Britain, it seems, does not have the manufacturing capability to make big castings in big volumes. Crewe may be the kings of hand craftsmanship. But when it comes to machine mass production, Germany still reigns supreme. 

📍 @greenofrichmond

Toyota GT86
Aero



GIANT
TEST

The car chase from basic instinct

Mazda has returned to base and built a first-principles sports car that's as light, compact and cheap as the first MX-5. And not a turbo in sight! Against Toyota GT86 and Audi TT we test its accessible sports car credentials

Words CJ Hubbard Photography James Lipman

Audi TT Roadster
2.0 TFSI S-line



Mazda MX-5 2.0
SE-L Nav





AFTER A QUARTER of a century and – here, now – four generations, the Mazda MX-5 has been judged everything from the saviour of the affordable everyday sports car to clichéd hairdresser's chariot of choice (saves on the blow-drying costs), middle-age crisis mobile and, increasingly, budget drift hack.

That's quite the quagmire of baggage for this brand new version to negotiate.

But if Mazda had any doubts or second thoughts about what it wanted to achieve with the Mk4, it doesn't show. Perhaps in reaction to accusations of stodge surrounding the third-generation car but certainly as champion of its current 'Skyactiv' engine philosophy, which takes a holistic engineering approach to efficiency, the new MX-5 is pared back to such an extent that it doesn't just look fighting fit but aggressively hungry. There is nothing superfluous about the exterior design – overhangs are almost unbelievably short given modern crash regulation; razor creases, and the way the

surfacing hugs the structure scream ultra-low BMI. It also carries over very little design language, looking more like an updated Honda S2000 that's been bred with DNA from BMW than any previous MX-5. Whatever, it is quite the sexy beast, and more importantly clearly signals Mazda's return to first principles: low weight and little frippery, in pursuit of a pure, involving driving experience.

Appearances are in no way deceptive in this regard. The classic front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, open-top formula continues, but the packaging is such that it's shorter than the tiny original – and though wider and equipped with modern safety kit, it's almost as light, too. This bigger-hearted 2.0-litre model is quoted at 1075kg, with driver. That's staggering, especially considering the conventional materials. Less mass to change direction and lug around means improved dynamic behaviour and efficiency without resort to the added complexity of turbochargers. Consider also the proper fabric folding roof that you can raise or lower in – literally – three seconds, and there's nothing else like it. Especially for the cost, which

The MX-5 is shorter than the tiny original and almost as light. 1075kg? Staggering



starts at just £5 more than the old car at the entry level and maxes out at just £23,995. This Meteor Grey 2.0-litre SE-L Nav? £21,235. Bargain.

Which is great, of course, but actually presents us with a minor problem: the MX-5 really has no direct rivals now. Mini's killed its Roadster (no big loss, that), and we can't imagine many MX-5 buyers seriously considering a Caterham Seven 160 instead. So how to contextualise this fun-wheel-drive yet style-conscious convertible? Force it to fight on both fronts at once.

When it comes to affordable, enthusiast-targeting rear-wheel drive, the Toyota GT86 (and it's slightly less loose-limbed Subaru BRZ cousin) is the obvious alternative candidate. Being a four-seater (just) coupe, it doesn't quite align with the MX-5's two-seater wind-in-the-hair schtick, but both cars promise easy access to the swaggering underworld of illicit, opportunistic oversteer, both eschew turbos for the immediacy of natural aspiration, and both sup from the chalice of minimised weight. While this particular Aero ▶

Radio 1 in the GT86,
6 Music in the
MX-5, the Today
programme in
the TT





GT86 Aero model runs more rear wing than Lewis Hamilton (and shares his demure taste)

version is over-burdened of bodykit and wing, has bigger wheels and grippier tyres, and comes in at a steep-ish £27,500 before options, the spirit is the same. And you can buy the basic 1238kg GT86 Primo for as little as £22,495. Surely you want to know whether the Mazda or the Toyota is the better driver's car.

The Audi TT Roadster is the default open-air style icon at the lower end of the market. Trouble is, Audi's idea of lower end is apparently different to everyone else's – my goodness has the TT gotten expensive. Doesn't help that there aren't any smaller capacity engines yet; this 227bhp 2.0-litre turbo is the least powerful petrol option currently on offer, and in the popular S-line specification it costs an eye-watering £33,820. And that's with front-wheel drive, not quattro. Big money and front-wheel drive doesn't sound much like an MX-5 rival, does it? Think differently. Not everyone will buy the MX-5 because of the way it drives, some will want it because of the way it looks and what it's like to live with. Besides, you'll find this TT is barely more expensive to lease than this GT86, thanks to Audi's typically healthy residual values.

The TT is definitely the adult of this group. The exterior is more considered and mature, while the interior exudes so much quality you detect the presence of its premium aura from yards away – and that's without the amazing digital dashboard switched on. Yet, compared to the dinky sparseness of the MX-5, it has the proportions of a heavy main battle tank; at 1395kg (with driver), it is also almost a third heavier. In a moment of cruel stereotyping, assisting hand James Taylor says the Mazda is a car for the hairdresser's receptionist, while the Audi clearly belongs to the salon owner. Which leaves our cosmetically enhanced GT86 as what? The wheels of the trendy stylist with all the tattoos and piercings? Probably.

Safe to say we've packed away the pointy objects – the scissors – as we fling the three of them along the astonishing undulations of the Yorkshire Dales' Buttermere Pass. This is not a road for distractions, as the elevation changes, patchwork surfacing and camber-variable corners sprinkle a much-needed added element of danger to the sheer drop on the side. And as we've already discovered one of the Buttermere has a lonely alloy wheel languishing at the bottom, it's apparent that none of the above takes any prisoners. To make rapid progress in this environment an intimate connection between driver and steed seems ideal. How has the old MX-5 *jinba ittai* ('horse and rider as one') jibber-jabber filtered down through the 26 years?

Well, James thinks the Mazda is possibly the best new car he's driven this year, praising the accessibility of the chassis, the snickety gearbox, the composure, and the way the combination of low weight and grunty 2.0-litre engine makes for an MX-5 that finally feels quick and exploitable. Though he also prefers the stiffer Bilstein suspension fitted to the range-topping 2.0-litre Sport model (as opposed to the 2.0 SE-L Nav on test), as it checks the bodyroll without really damaging the already pattery ride quality. I'm not so immediately convinced.

You get a clue about how Mazda has pulled off the Incredible Shrinking Roadster as soon as you get inside. The cabin is very compact. So compact that if you're much over six foot you'll find it a squeeze, especially with the roof up. A covert suggestion that manly men need not apply? Fortunately, that roof mechanism is so simple – unlatch, flip back, slam down to open, unlatch, flip up and clip shut to close, it takes longer to read than to do – that you can make the most of any break in the weather. I'm 5ft 11in, and with the unexpectedly high seating position that somehow seems to feel like its tipping you forwards, I find that I'm subconsciously hunching down below the heavily canted windscreen as the car dives into corners. Imagine it as if you're tucked up behind an aero screen in some kind of vintage racer, and I guess it adds to the charm. But I'd like to be seated closer to the floor.

With such compressed cabin space, storage is at a premium; there's no glovebox, just a cubby between the seats, but the deep-welled 130-litre boot will swallow a pair of substantial overnight bags. Yet Mazda has found room for an otherwise decent driving position, and while the infotainment is like a children's version of iDrive, its simplicity gels with the general MX-5 purity vibe. The functionality is excellent, making it ideal for fiddling with during the straight bits between the corners.

Ahh, the corners. Two things. Firstly, this 158bhp MX-5 may have the least amount of power on test but it isn't the slowest car – hair-trigger throttle response, close gearing and flyweight construction means 0-62mph in 7.3sec versus the Toyota's 7.7. So the straights don't necessarily last all that long, even if in comparison to the zingy, high-revving 1.5-litre alternative, the 2.0-litre MX-5 lump seems a touch too much like it was destined for a Mazda 6 and ended up in a sports car by mistake. Secondly, you'd better be ready when the corners arrive, because this is where the MX-5 really comes alive.

The steering is light – some will think too light – but accurate and detailed, especially for an electrically assisted set-up, and together with a fair degree of body roll the family connection ▶



KEY TECH: MAZDA MX-5 Skyactiv's holistic reduction agency

How has Mazda made the new MX-5 so light? 1075kg for a 2.0-litre sports car that doesn't wilt at the first sign of a crash test is a real achievement. The answer is in Mazda's 'gram-strategy': the process of shaving weight from every individual part. Example results include a roof that's 3kg lighter than the previous model's and front upper wishbones that look like toothpicks. It all falls under the Skyactiv umbrella, which combines weight savings with engines and all, and helps enable a virtuous circle of every greater overall improvements. Without turbos.

The TT is barely more expensive to lease than the GT86 due to Audi residuals



It's a fair bet it's in second gear. It's always in second gear. You can do 70mph in second. No heroic shuffling required



Lane deviation warning not needed in the MX-5. Trust us – you won't drift off to sleep

CBeebies iDrive

Most of what BMW's massive brain can do is replicated here in a kind of multimedia pastiche. Not perfect, but its simplicity and good functionality suit the car exactly

▶ Prod enough switches and you'll see where Mazda didn't spend Audi's £10k premium. Still neat though

Steering too light?

Electrically assisted steering lighter than ideal when balancing a slide, but it's pretty accurate and quite chatty

Good old Halfords

Toyota presumably quite rightly reasons that you'll be too busy showboating to notice that they forgot to spec a decent infotainment interface. Not aftermarket but certainly afterthought

▶ They know you're here to have fun and that you do. Big sexy rev counter, lovely tactile gearstick. Cheap but very cheerful indeed

The best seat

Steering wheel and fake carbon frippery may be cheesy, but seating position is so perfect you feel totally fused with the car. Toyota nails it!

Big screen entert...

...no wait! Where's the screen? You can't say Audis aren't driver focused when they put all the fun in the instrument binnacle. Expect a passenger protest outside Audi HQ. Down with this sort of thing!

Spend, spend etc

If you can touch it, Audi covers it in aluminium or leather. It's not an edge-of-the-seat car, it's a sit-back-in-the-seat car. Best in Dynamic mode

KEY TECH: AUDI TTS

Clever cabin fever



The latest TT is a masterclass in mixed materials – aluminium and steel combining to reduce weight and control scuttle-shake, the latter very successfully. But it's the high-tech interior that will blow you away. From the displays built into the air vents to the digital dash it's not hard to see how Audi justifies the extra £10k. Will the gloss last? Maybe. But don't come crying to us if your passenger moans about the lack of central display to keep them entertained, and is it us, or do conventional dials seem less eye-straining when driving at night?

to the Mk1 MX-5 floods through as if the decades between them were a mere blink of the eye. This is good. Very good – that long-lamented classic sports car feel, back in a cutting edge package. What might take you by surprise, however, is just how lively the rear end is. The Toyota's famously playful set-up ain't got nothing on this, as the Mazda instantly acts as if it wants to rotate, openly encouraging you to prod that right-hand pedal harder and earlier. And lo, with a standard limited-slip diff on 2.0-litre cars and a stability control system that allows a remarkable degree of freedom before gently reining you in, you'll find yourself skating around roundabouts in no time. Blimey.

There is no disputing the degree of intimacy and involvement that engenders this unusually rapid, hooliganising reaction. My concern is that when the road gets challenging, the degree to which the MX-5 skitters – suiting part-time racing driver James perfectly – may make mere mortals nervous. I find I'm more comfortable driving the GT86 harder in the Dales, and for two cars that do appear to be similar in ethos on paper, the difference between them is surprisingly pronounced.

Much is already said about the underwhelming 197bhp boxer engine

in the Toyota. The gearbox is hideously notchy when cold, as well – a far cry from the oily precision of the Mazda's magic wand. But the closed roof gives the GT86 torsional rigidity the MX-5 can only dream of, and the high-frequency buzz that overlays the bassy boxer rumble adds a distinct race-car edge that the much weightier steering, firmer ride and generally more serious demeanour of the Toyota thoroughly reinforce. Yes, serious and GT86 in the same sentence; maybe it's the bigger, stickier tyres of the Aero, but this doesn't feel so much like a toy anymore as a trackday waiting to happen. Sharp-witted and urgent.

Out in the wilderness, as the rain begins to change up the surfaces in unpredictable patches, the Toyota's longer wheelbase, tougher damping and – yes – less excitable rear do wonders for consistent stability, allowing you to keep on attacking the turns. Crucially, involvement remains at the very forefront, and James concedes it's got the MX-5's measure when it comes to outright handling. But he can't get over the flat, insipid engine. It takes commitment to maintain the revs required to keep the motor keen, even aided by the short throw of the gearbox, higher rev-limit and onwards-egging hyper-blink of the upshift light. Wearisome if you're not in the mood. The interior is a touch too JDM, yo, with the fake carbonfibre, lack of refinement and afterthought of an infotainment system, but I'll forgive that for the driving position, which centres you right in the action. Shame about the brakes, which are dull to finesse and quickly resort to activating the ABS.

If it's the centre of the action you want, the TT probably isn't the answer. The interior will turn anyone's head (especially the passenger's, now they're forced to lean over and look ▶

KEY TECH: TOYOTA GT86 Rubber soul



One of the amazing things about the GT86 is that the standard car gets the same rubber as the Prius – skinny 215-section, low-friction Michelin Primacy eco tyres with about as much lateral grip as an ice cube on a hot bonnet. This, together with the low centre of gravity and keen chassis, make it a great entry-point into rear-wheel drive. But as this Aero version's wider, stickier 225-section Yokohamas and 18in wheels prove, a bit more grip adds to the experience.


at the instrument cluster if they want to see any sat-nav action), and with the roof up such is the refinement and lack of scuttle-shake you could easily believe you're in a coupe. 10 seconds is all it takes to electrically stow, and with an also electrically operated windbreak the sense that you're in something properly premium never, ever diminishes. Whoever put the volume knob on the far side of the gearlever needs a slap, though, regardless of all the controls on the steering wheel. On the journey to Yorkshire the TT sweeps aside torrential rain on the A1 with barely any consideration, then acts stubbornly disinterested once the roads get more intricate. Imperious is a word that springs to mind. Aloof is another.

As such, we find ourselves struggling to think of it as a 'sports car' in this company. Turbo boost makes it fastest – 0-62mph in 6.1sec – but it can't match the instant pedal response of our naturally aspirated duo, a situa-

tion that isn't helped by the crazy gearing. The Audi will top an indicated 70mph in second, which basically makes this the only gear you need for most of Buttermere. In the MX-5 you snatch third around 50, keeping the car forever in the meat

of its power band. The TT's engine is impressively flexible, but overall, compared to the driver-grooming intimacy of the others, it's fuzzy and slow-witted.

But switching all systems to Dynamic does make a difference, and the more you drive the TT the more stirring it becomes. This car has conventional S-line suspension rather than fancy variable damping, and despite 19in wheels it does a mega job of dealing with the Dales' disruptive topography. Grip is huge – who needs quattro? – and whenever traction is limited you get a hilarious exhaust noise reminiscent of an anti-lag system. The quicker you cover ground, the more it seems to let down its defences and reveal some genuine character. As an all-round package it has considerable appeal.

So, this is a close one – closer than it first appeared. The Audi has the speed and tech to maintain a premium experience well beyond the others, no shame if that's what appeals. But it isn't as fun and, actually, given the price difference you won't feel short-changed inside the more visually arresting Mazda. Third for Ingolstadt. The GT86 challenges the MX-5 at a much more fundamental level. Fantastically engaging from behind the wheel, the Toyota is a car we could drive and drive and drive; the tricky part would be enduring that engine and interior on every daily grind. No such qualms about the Mazda. The chassis dares you to rise to the challenge, and with its exceptional gearbox and fervent responses, the MX-5 is everything an everyday sports car should be, right down to the effortless roof and undemanding yet high quality interior. Now to decide between the faster 2.0-litre and the more charismatic 1.5... 

©ir_427

2nd

Raucous, pliable, fantastic fun to drive when you're in the mood. When you're not in the mood the interior and engine get on your nerves

1st

Mazda's journey back to first principles is a hit. Not only is the MX-5 as light and affordable as the Mk1, it's nicely made and ace to drive

3rd

Oozes so much quality you fear skidding on a patch of premiumness, but brilliant though it is, it's having more fun than you are



Toyota GT86 Aero

Price (as tested) | £27,500 (£28,250)

Engine
1998cc 16v
four-cylinder
petrol

Transmission
Six-speed
manual, rear-
wheel drive
with limited-slip
differential

Suspension
MacPherson
strut front,
double
wishbone rear



Made of steel

Mazda MX-5 2.0 SE-L Nav

Price (as tested) | £20,695 (£21,235)

Engine
1998cc 16v
four-cylinder
petrol

Transmission
Six-speed
manual, rear-
wheel drive
with limited-
slip differential

Suspension
Double
wishbone front,
multi-link rear



Made of aluminium and steel

Audi TT Roadster 2.0 TFSI S-line

Price (as tested) | £33,820 (£40,310)

Engine
1984cc 16v
four-cylinder
turbo petrol

Transmission
Six-speed
manual, front-
wheel drive

Suspension
MacPherson
strut front,
multi-link rear



Made of aluminium and steel

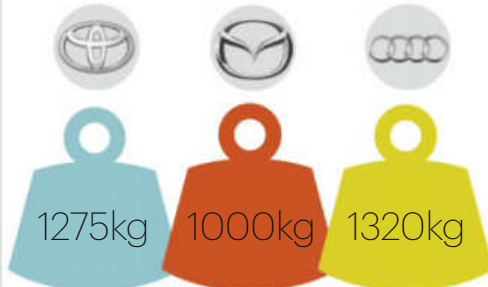
Power & torque

We say: Forget the bhp – Audi absolutely monsters the others for torque...



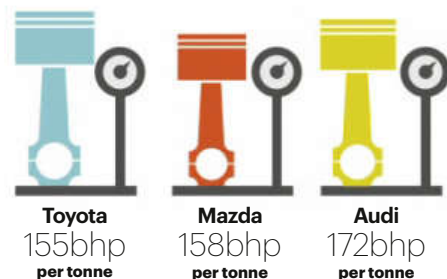
Weight

We say: ...but the Audi needs extra muscle as it's also been at the pork scratchings



Power-to-weight

We say: Mazda's gram-strategy bests Toyota. Coke fiends tend to be skinny, right?



0-62mph

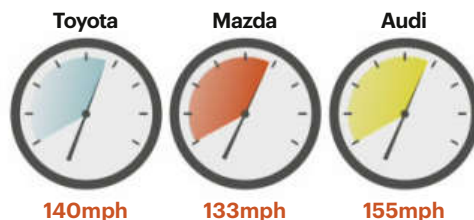
We say: Mazda's immediacy makes it feel quicker to 30mph than the turbo TT, but by the time you hit 62mph it's dust

Toyota 7.7sec
Mazda 7.3sec
Audi 6.1sec



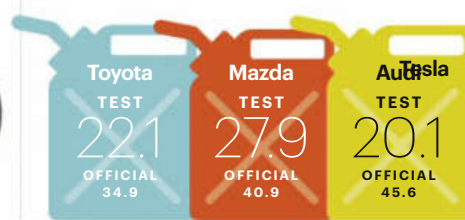
Top speed

We say: Our money says that the Mazda feels faster at 133 than the Audi does at 155



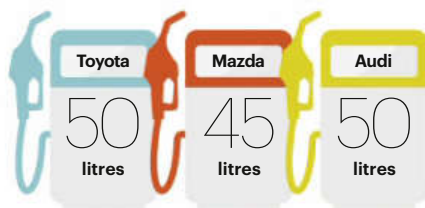
Official & test mpg

We say: Long gearing = lots of 2nd gear work for the TT, killing the turbo's eco advantage



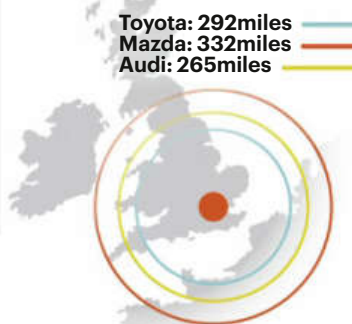
Fuel tank

We say: Smallest car has smallest tank. Go figure.



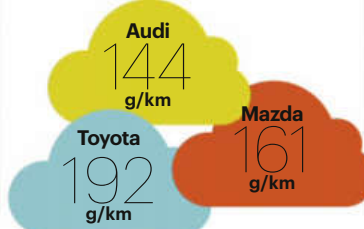
Range

We say: Mazda's Skyactiv ekes more miles from smallest tank



CO2

We say: Official CO2 figures make the Audi by far the cheapest to tax



Lease rates

We say: Only £4 more a month for the Audi? Might be tempting





Sierra Cosworth (Blomqvist!), Lancia Stratos (Munari!),
Escort RS Mk1, Jide 1600



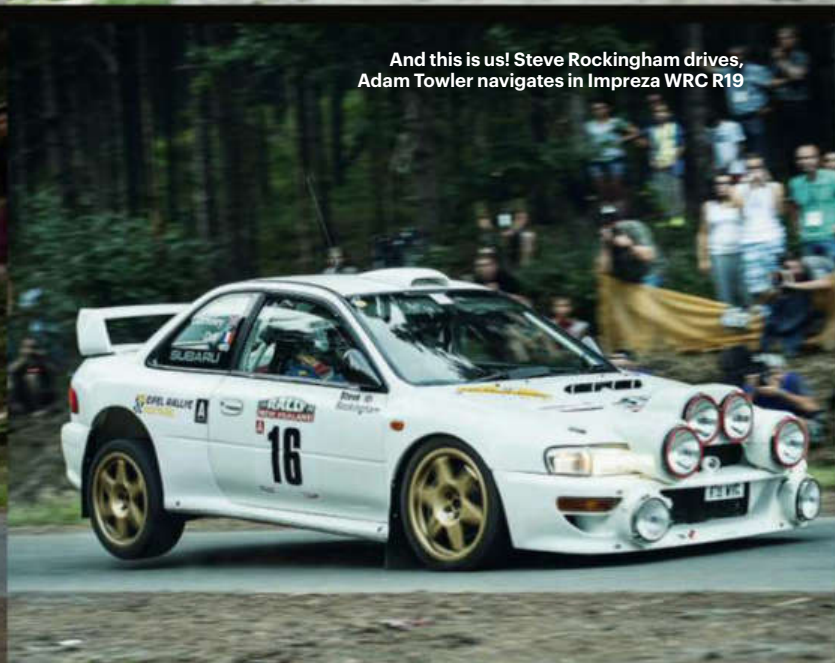
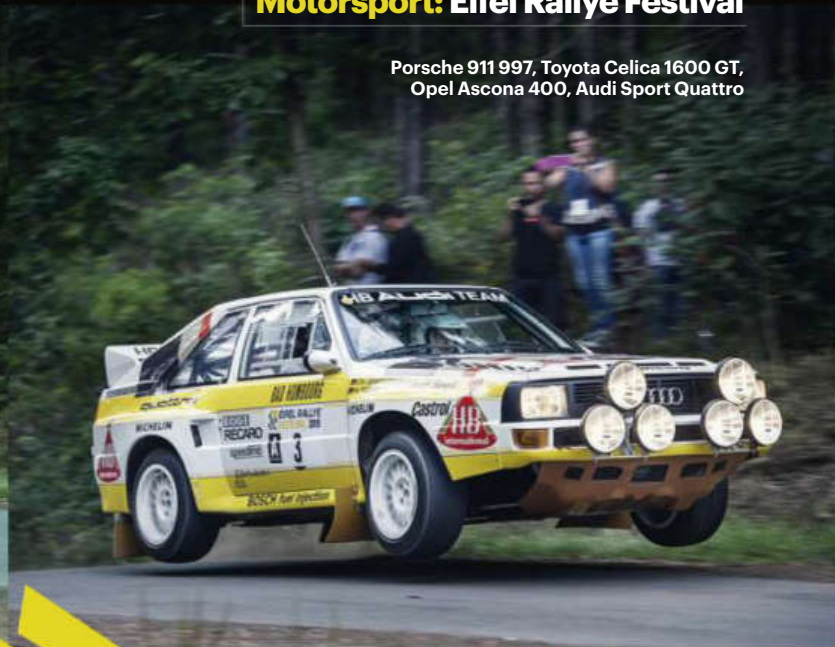
WEEKEND OF THE GODS

They're all here: Hannu Mikkola, Stig Blomqvist, Walter Röhrl... and us, in Colin McRae's Impreza. In a quiet German town for one weekend of frenetic action, the ghosts of rallying's golden past rise again

Words Adam Towler Photography Tom Salt

Motorsport: Eifel Rallye Festival

Porsche 911 997, Toyota Celica 1600 GT,
Opel Ascona 400, Audi Sport Quattro



And this is us! Steve Rockingham drives,
Adam Towler navigates in Impreza WRC R19

CAN'T TALK. I don't mean in the metaphoric sense; I mean, I really can't talk. My mouth opens but only a pathetic croak emerges, interspersed at random moments with a crack that sends my suffering vocal chords soaring an octave higher. This could be a problem: in just a few hours I will be calling pace notes from the very seat where Nicky Grist once guided Colin McRae to victory in the 1998 Rally of Portugal. The ceremonial start of the 2015 Eifel Rallye Festival, a gathering every year of flame-spewing old rally cars and star drivers, is just an hour or so away.

A surreal few days begins in a small hotel in the provincial town of Daun, Germany. I am sitting down to breakfast when in walks a kindly looking older chap with a deep, Floridian tan and piercing blue eyes. He looks straight at me, smiles quietly, and then ambles over to the cereal selection. It's Hannu Mikkola. *The Hannu Mikkola*, as in the 1983 World Rally Champion. As I turn back wide-eyed to contemplate my dry croissant his long-time co-driver Arne Hertz strolls past as if he's on the way to the hotel pool.

The man I'm here to share breakfast with arrives a few minutes later. The thick-rimmed spectacles and sturdy physique are as unremarkable today as the polo shirt, shorts and canvas shoes of any sexagenarian on holiday, but in the mid-'80s they lent this Flying Finn the nickname *Löysä* – 'slack' – for, when combined with his chain smoking habit, they gave the impression that Timo Salonen wasn't, perhaps, taking the sport as seriously as some of his rivals. His blistering raw speed soon made that epithet deeply ironic.

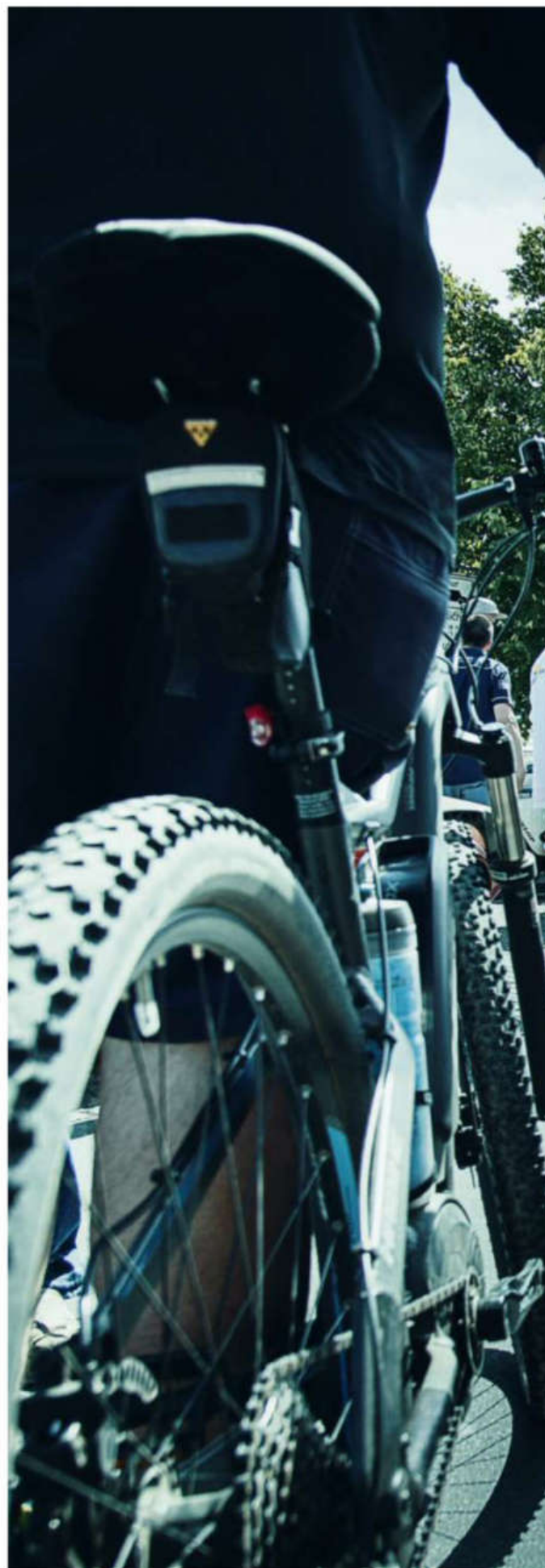
He tells me he hasn't driven a Group B Peugeot 205 T16 since the end of the 1986 RAC Rally – until yesterday that is. 'It felt like I have been making rally one week ago,' he says in a deep, clipped Finnish accent. Timo arrived in the 1985 Peugeot team as the understudy to Ari Vatanen's star turn, but the tables soon turned: 'I had no pressure, but after two, three rallies, Vatanen had big pressure. It was a big surprise to Ari that I was so fast.' It's a sentiment echoed later when I chat to Maurice Picquenot in the service park. He's here looking after the T16 that Timo will drive tomorrow, and was Timo's chief mechanic during that spine-tingling '85 season: he hasn't seen Timo for 29 years either.

There are over 150 rally cars entered into this festival of gratuitous oversteer: everything from a two-stroke Saab that billows blue smoke, to those ferocious Group B monsters of the 1980s, such as the MG Metro 6R4 and the short-wheelbase Audi Sport Quattro. There are Group A Integrales and WRC-era Corollas; drifting Group 4 Escorts, and Sandro Munari in the car forever associated with his driving genius, the Lancia Stratos in Alitalia colours. Walter Röhrl, naturally, is present, as he is every year. Even in just our little corner of ▶

Our man with Timo Salonen: 'Sugar right 5 over plate, cornflakes left 3 don't cut' etc

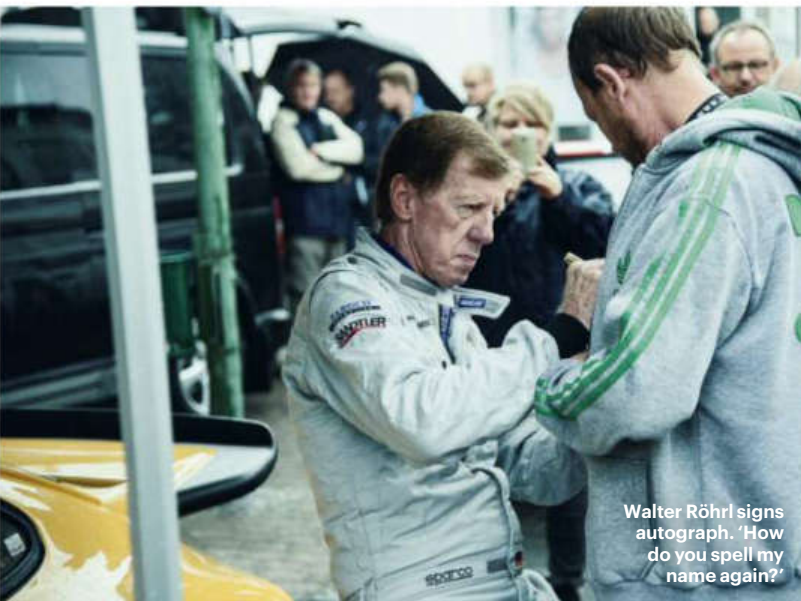


Drivers do autographs, we wait outside in the Subaru





**Sandro Munari
in the car forever
associated with his
driving genius, the
Lancia Stratos**



Walter Röhrl signs autograph. 'How do you spell my name again?'



Steve Rockingham all set in the Impreza. He's on his own, frankly

They don't release stage times, so the still-outlawed Group B cars can compete



It all comes flooding back: 1985 Audi Sport Quattro Group B car with period Audi factory driver Harald Demuth at the wheel



Munari in the Alitalia-liveried Stratos. We caught him up!

the service park there are two Ford RS200s parked alongside and a three-door Sierra RS Cosworth driven this weekend by 1984 World Rally Champion Stig Blomqvist. The organisers do not release the stage times, which means the still-outlawed Group B machines can actively compete, but that doesn't stop everyone trying very hard indeed.

First, a confession: I have never navigated in a rally car before, a fact that seems absurd given the company I'm keeping and the car I'll be calling the notes from. That I'm here is entirely due to my friend Steve Rockingham, who owns 'R19WRC'. He loves rallying, started driving competitively in road rallies years ago, and nowadays does the odd rally while regularly demonstrating his cars at events like this one.

'Don't worry if you get lost or you throw up,' says Steve cheerfully, trying to be encouraging. 'I've driven some of the stages before and it's meant to be fun.' But I know that Steve, a successful and competitive bloke, will want to put on a good show for the thousands of spectators expected to line the special stages, just as I suspect Steve knows that I, as a rallying-obsessed car nut, will be mortified if I'm not immediately up to scratch, however unrealistic that might be.

'R19' debuted at Rally GB in 1997 with Kenneth Eriksson at the wheel; while Colin and Nicky won in a sister Prodrive Impreza WRC, 'R19' retired ingloriously on the very first stage. In 1998 Colin drove 'R19' to that Portuguese success, and in 1999 it did a full WRC season in the hands of Freddy Dor, a wealthy French businessman closely associated with Prodrive. He was not a man who required sponsors; hence the plain white livery the car wears to this day.

Steve doesn't have a lavish team of mechanics, so we have to share all the prep duties and pack everything into his works van. That's the same van we use for recceing the stages, which leads to the amusing sight of a Vito sideways on gravel. Steve's regular co-driver Fiona has photocopied her pace notes from previous years, but they need adjustment for this year's changes, and one stage is new anyway. Making pace notes is engrossing, but reading and writing on the move makes me nauseous, which bodes ill for tomorrow.

It's Saturday evening, and there's no time to worry about my disappearing voice now. It's the infamous Hilgerath: 12.53 special stage miles, begun at dusk. A large crowd sees us off from the town centre, while all

along the road route fans wave from the kerbside.

My nerves really spike as we reach the time control for the stage. After fumbling with intercom lead, headset, helmet and Hans device, finally I manage to connect everything, click together my belts, tighten them enthusiastically until my privates make me wince, and all just in time as we pull up to the start line. The crowd, five-deep in places, looks on animatedly.

We're next, and I'm sweating profusely. I glance across and observe Steve's face, reddish and perspiring behind the no-mex face mask, the eyes bulging with raw concentration and the breathing fast on the intercom, and I suddenly realise how psyched he is; how psyched you have to be to drive a proper World Rally Car with conviction on a special stage. This is going to be wild. And it is.

Go! Hilgerath begins with a long, high-speed section on a main road, and we're soon on the rev limiter in top gear, the transmission whining so loud it's boring a hole through my helmet. I remember this from the recce: awkward braking at high speed while still exiting the 'left-four' of an S-bend. Ooof! The water-cooled brakes bite so hard I feel the air compressed from my lungs – just as well, then, that I've already called the 'right-two' that leads off into the forest. Steve controls the inevitable wag of the tail with a snap of the wrists, then exaggerates it with a Scandinavian flick before judicious use of the 'bar' to make the next right.

The racket inside the car is immense, and aware that my vocal chords are giving up I shout as loud as I possibly can. For Steve, headset turned up to the appropriate volume, they're practically splitting his eardrums. Repeatedly he gesticulates to calm down while we slide perilously between trees, but I can't decipher a word, and continue to manically rasp out instructions. Eventually Steve bravely reaches behind his seat and turns me down, but not before I get mixed up with the notes, lose my place, and have to admit 'on air' that I'm merely a passenger, which leaves me stewing in abject fury with myself, compounded when I get us lost leaving the stage afterwards.

Nevertheless, the adrenalin means I'm deliriously happy as we return the Subaru clanking and stuttering into the service park. By the time we've packed the Impreza away for the night the rain is hammering on the roof of the awning, and with most fans retired to the local bars, I find myself sharing a beer with Stig and Steve, the three of us chatting about the state ▶



Colin McRae won the '98 Portuguese Rally in this car. We understand why

Then the unthinkable:
we catch the Munari
Stratos mid-stage. It's
like 1990s Sega Rally



The 5 ages of World Rallying

1973-1981

The early years

First World Championship comprises classic events from the rally calendar. The '70s is the era of flamboyant heroes such as Munari, Clark and Mikkola. Regs permit a broad variety of cars, from mid-engined Lancias to heavyweight 450SLC Merc coupes.



1987-1996
Group A

Production-based cars mark the new era, which matures into a thrilling battle of various factory teams from Europe and Japan: think Integrale, Celica GT4, Escort Cosworth, Impreza and Mitsubishi Evo, all with memorable road versions.



2011-present
Smaller is better?

WRC attempts to regroup, with smaller, more dramatic cars powered by 1.6-litre engines. VW and Hyundai factory teams do battle, with the former's big budget making them the new force. Still no big UK TV deal though.



1982-1986
Group B

Low production numbers (200) combine with turbo power, 4wd and composite bodywork to create F1 acceleration on gravel. Popular, but dangerous for drivers and spectators, and Henri Toivonen's death in Corsica in '86 leads to the cars being banned.



1997-2010
The WRC era

Cost forces WRC to move away from homologation and the sport makes a play for increased TV airtime. Night stages are dropped and rallies made much shorter. It works for a bit, then Sebastian Loeb's domination and declining entries scare TV off.



Steve knows the Demerath stage well. Just as well, as our man's got his pace notes in the wrong order again



Veteran of the '74 Safari Rally, 911 Carrera RS 2.7 pushes on



1970

1980

1990

2000

2010



of modern rallying in the dim light of a wet Eifel evening. It's one of those moments when you repeatedly pinch yourself on the arm just to check you're not dreaming.

It's still raining on Saturday morning, and so we change to intermediate tyres. Ahead of us lie three stages, repeated again in the afternoon. After last night's baptism of near-bewilderment, I'm doubly determined to raise my game.


The Kelberg stage is a beast, but thankfully nausea doesn't seem to trouble me, and things are going better until I lose my place again; I've written my new notes far too densely packed together, inviting trouble. I should have written them out again in the hotel room last night but didn't dare to, in case I copied them wrongly.

Onwards, then, to the Demerath stage. Steve knows this one, and goes on the attack. I'm learning fast, but then disaster: my notes are in the wrong order, another daft mistake.

At Lehwald, SS5, the notes get wet when we dive through a particularly deep puddle, water splurging over the familiar intake mouth on the bonnet and splashing me through the slightly ajar passenger's window. The last two pages stick in the heat of the moment, and I'm too slow again with the next instruction.

On the penultimate stage of the day Munari suddenly appears as we queue for the stage start, apparently having located a suitable piece of undergrowth to do the necessary. I ask him to sign my roadbook and he obliges, before his co-driver shouts over urging him to clamber back into the Stratos for the start.

Then the unthinkable: we've caught the Munari Stratos mid-stage. It's like Sega Rally in the arcades, back in the 1990s. The back of the Lancia now completely fills our windscreen, slewing violently left then right like a computer graphic driven in 'behind the car' view. The un-silenced bark of the Dino V6 nearly shatters the glass yet still I hear Steve curse at the holdup, the adrenalin of the moment temporarily superseding his natural respect for the legend. One turbocharged lunge and we're past, two wheels on the grass. Sideways. *Ciao, Sandro!* I raise a hand in apologetic thanks; this is brilliantly ridiculous.

By the final stage of the day I just want to complete one run without any silly errors. And then, just for a brief moment, something clicks. Later, analysing everything, I realise I barely look up from my notes, sensing instead where we are on the stage by feeling the car's movement left and right, side to side, pivoting. My notes are in sync with the car and Steve, and it's a wonderful, almost ethereal feeling; perhaps a tiny, fleeting glimpse of that special togetherness Colin and Nicky always felt in R19WRC, both relying equally on each other to achieve something amazing through trust alone – and to stay alive. As we cross the finish there's sheer exhilaration, which has barely subsided by the time we return one last time to the service park, and the raucous bray of the Subaru finally falls silent. The mud is already drying pale and crusty, Stig grins at me knowingly, and the beer tastes really, really good. 

'86 Ford RS200 in the workshop area. 'I'd offer you a beer but we've only got 31 bottles'



↑
Stig Blomqvist, 1984 World Rally Champion, has met some ace co-drivers in his time. Now he's also met Adam Towler



SIMM ONALO

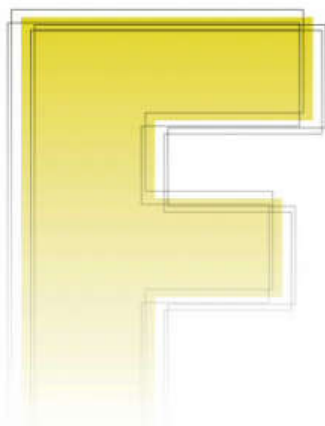
This is the other front in the hot-hatch war. While the 300bhp heavyweights knock



ERING WHEAT

lumps out of each other, lesser-powered superminis seek the truer sweet spot

Words: CJ Hubbard Photography: John Wycherley



FORGET THOSE NEW 300bhp+ family-sized monsters, the real hot-hatch sweet spot is now the supermini class, where compact dimensions and circa 200bhp gleefully distort the smiles-per-mile scale with mischievous dexterity, hard-hitting performance and that special ingredient: affordability. In theory.

Here we have two old-stagers and a double shot of fresh blood, tested

on road and track. That's only 'old' in the context of a yoof that changes its phone every five minutes, of course. The Fiesta ST arrived in 2013 and has already entered into fast-Ford lore, while the 208 GTi 30th was initially deployed as a limited edition last year, but has subsequently morphed into a full production model in the recently revised range under the same title of '208 GTi by Peugeot Sport', and priced at the same £21,995. Hoping to give them both a duffing are the brand spanking Mini John Cooper Works and very latest Vauxhall Corsa VXR, newcomers that couldn't be more different.

At £17,995, the Corsa is a bargain bruiser, amped up as tested with the optional £2400 Performance Pack. This adds the urgent Drexler limited-slip diff from the preceding Nürburgring edition, 330mm Brembo front brakes, 18-inch wheels with Michelin Pilot Supersports and stiffer settings for the trick Koni FSD shock absorbers. This aside, updates to the engine include an entirely new induction system, intercooler and turbo-integrated manifold, while completely overhauled suspension promises to close the agility gap on previously more adept rivals. Apparently the 'Lex Ferrari' exemption from EU drive-by noise regulations also helps it squeeze an extra decibel past the blokes with clipboards.

Can't help wishing Vauxhall had put this to better use – punchy this 202bhp 1.6 may be, charismatic it is not. But you might have guessed that from the visuals, which trade style for belligerence. Just look at all the vents in the bumper.

Sadly, there's no EU paperwork wrangle for speeding ticket exemption. Which would be handy in all of these cars, but especially the Mini. This third-generation JCW is the marque's most powerful model ever. Upsizing from a 1.6 turbo to a 2.0 turbo between generations means it now has 228bhp, and 0-62mph takes only 6.1sec thanks to the launch control that comes with the optional automatic gearbox (the entire initial production run was thus equipped, though a six-speed manual remains standard). That's 0.4sec faster than the Vauxhall and the Peugeot, and a massive 0.8sec faster than the Ford – compounded by 236lb ft at just 1250rpm, making this pocket rocket the Saturn V of this particular grouping. Boy, is it fast.

At £23,050 basic, £24,380 with the auto, the Mini further justifies being most expensive by coming equipped as standard with Brembos, high-strength steel suspension components and torque-steer-resistant split driveshafts. It also makes such amusing noises that you can almost forgive it the lack of steering feel. Shame the range of popping and banging sounds is so consistent you'd swear the on-board brain is selecting special effects from a menu rather than letting the engine breathe to its maximum. Hands up who's surprised.

In fact, the Mini is a strange blend of maturity and madness all round. It's the only car here to offer two-stage variable damping – well worth the £240, since you can mix and match the settings with the drivetrain and gearbox; it's brutal in Sport on the road, but otherwise impressively composed – the interior ▶

2nd opinion: Ben Miller Mini's twisted logic

At nearly 230bhp and £30k with options, the Mini is enough to send luddites running for their steel-rimmed Peugeot 106 Rallye and its carpeted biscuit-tin interior. The semi-auto JCW is all so excessive, surely? Then you drive it, exhaust parping as the turbo four piles on speed. Powerful brakes and a playful chassis complete a furiously entertaining package. Some of the design touches remain inexplicable, but on the move it makes a twisted kind of sense. The timeless Fiesta ST is diametrically opposed – a giggling, hugely talented sports car and a versatile, affordable and easy to own hatchback under one roof. Genius.



For a car that looks like a cartoon character, the VXR is strangely colourless to drive



'A strange blend of maturity and madness'. But enough about CJ...

The Mini is 0.4sec faster than Corsa and 208, and a massive 0.8 faster than the Ford. Boy, is it fast





Mini: quality to knock the others into the middle of next week



208: brilliant sports seats, tiny wheel, inexplicably big gearknob

is by far the best quality, and it's packed with as much premium tech as your wallet can handle, including a head-up display in this instance. Yet that cabin is such a crazy mix of materials and intricate details that you'll go dizzy trying to figure out where to look first.

More dizziness from the super-quick steering, which delivers a really darty, dynamic initial impression, augmented by Mini's multi-level electronic traction control systems. But the response is so slick all the intimacy of feedback slips away in your hands, and with that super pokey engine it starts to feel nervous at higher speeds, despite ultimately not being as pointy as the Peugeot or Ford. The auto 'box probably doesn't help, but the end result is the hot hatch made synthetic – very smooth, very capable, but lacking in the gritty involvement that makes the best so addictive.

If it's gritty involvement you want, try the Peugeot 30th. Adding a wider track, stiffer

suspension and the Torsen mechanical limited-slip diff from the RCZ R, Peugeot Sport has put beef on the bones of the regular 208 GTi, while an extra 8bhp brings the Pug's 1.6-litre turbo up to a symbolic 205bhp/208ps, shaving 0.3sec from the 0-62mph time in the process. With shorter gearing and recalibrated steering, this is immediately a much more determined machine. Our car has dodged the dubious *Coupe Franche* two-tone paint option, but with matte black wheelarch extensions, new 18-inch wheels and 10mm lower stance it looks decidedly purposeful – a chunky pair of Peugeot Sport seats keeping up this impetus inside.

On track, it is awesomely focused. The neat and tidy, fast-lapping experience is dominated by the diff – but rather than being overbearing and unpredictable (*cough Corsa cough*), this manifests as immense, consistent traction and massive forward momentum, encouraging you to push harder and faster with every



We went to Rockingham to open the dynamic envelope. Mini's quick, but Pug and Ford more fun

2nd opinion: James Taylor Corsa's harsh lesson

Bit unfortunate for the VXR the other three cars were here, because in isolation it's pretty good. Those (optional) sticky tyres give it grip to throw away and at Rockingham's hairpin the (also optional) LSD fires it out of the corner as quickly as the (yes, optional) big brakes stop it on the way in. For neat, fast lapping it's up with the best, but back-to-back it feels a bit flat. The engine sounds as dull as the gearshift feels vague. The Peugeot is keener to rev, keener to dance and with ferocious traction from that trick diff. It's not lost its flowing ride either; the ST discovers bumps you never knew existed, the 208 makes them disappear. I'd keep the stability control on though!





Fiesta: ask your mum how the buttons work – they're the same on her 1.25 Zetec



Corsa: despite fab leather Recaros it's not happening. Gearknob just nasty

rotation. Mega brakes – the third, and best, set of Brembos here – provide further confidence, and if the steering is still a little light, the tiny wheel exacerbates its eagerness to turn in and you're never left doubting its accuracy. Yet by softening the front anti-roll bar, backing off the traction control and boosting the rear springs by 80%, Peugeot Sport has dialled in a chassis that can and will dance about if you choose to exploit critical moments of weight transfer. It's never quite as comfortable to tango with as the Fiesta, but if you want wild corner-entry angles they're available.

Where the 208 is more comfortable is on the road, since the 30th retains much of the standard GTi's suppleness in spite of the successfully enhanced body control. It's also got excellent pedal spacing, every joyful heel-and-toe making up for a manual shift action that's a touch soft and mushy. We'll take this over the vague notchiness of the Corsa's gearchange any day, though; Vauxhall says the throw is 13% shorter now, so it's amazing that it manages to remain so balky and obstinate. Nasty gearknob, too. The stitching feels rough in your palm, and with its awkwardly squared-off

shape it's like a golf club in a gimp mask.

And herein lies our difficulty with the Corsa VXR. It is not a bad car in isolation, but brought into this group it's let down by the details. The interior is so plain that even a nice steering wheel and the fabulous shell-backed Recaros struggle to raise any enthusiasm, and that's with the Vogon chic of the banded leather finishing. Driving it, you find yourself wanting more of everything – more noise, more revs, more steering feel and, critically, either more compliance or more control. How has Vauxhall made it so stiff yet so woolly ▶

Peugeot's chassis will dance about if you exploit it. It's not quite as comfy to tango with as the Fiesta





Assuming the driver has his trousers on, this is the most fun he can have



The Fiesta will make you feel like a god, albeit a god with a bit of a sore back



Whatever tune pops into your head, a fiver says it's by Ennio Morricone




feeling? The only exception to this rule is the Drexler diff. We'd have less of that, were it possible, as it comes in with such aggression you have to wait it out before fully committing as you can't always predict which way the nose is going to jink under power. Then you hit the limiter, the sheer uniformity of the blaring engine note offering no aural warning to upshift at all. It's kind of fun in a raw, scruff-of-the-neck sort of way, but becomes increasingly frustrating. If you aren't going on track we'd strongly suggest you avoid the Performance Pack temptation.

When it comes to avoiding temptation, the Fiesta ST looks positively angelic in this company. Yes there's a body kit, but with no garish decals, over-sized air scoops or ginormous brake set-up, it seems almost quaint and certainly dainty.

The stated 180bhp power output of this bone stock version reflects this deception, as does that comparatively sluggish 6.9sec 0-62 time. And the interior? Divisively huggy seats aside, it's the same terrifying phalanx of scattershot buttons as your mum's regular shopping trolley. Oh, how it plants the seed of lies! If any of these cars is going to get you into hijinks and scrapes, it is most definitely this one.

That 180bhp is an insurance-massaging subterfuge, for a start – in the American market, the Fiesta ST is ratified at 197bhp, which is what the turbo 1.6 actually peaks at on overboost. It is also decidedly the most naturally aspirated feeling of any of these units, not entirely lag-free but revvy and willing, and ballistic towards the top. The gearshift is the most positive, too, while the steering layers on detail

in such a manner that you can't help but dive in and indulge. It's not as if the chassis is going to turn down your advances – the torque-vectoring electronics that substitute for a mechanical diff in the front of the Ford are capable of gymnastic feats no other car in this test can match, and for an artificial aid it is incredibly transparent in its intentions. It will make you feel like a god. Albeit a god with a bit of a sore back, given the pogoing, hyperactive firmness to the accompanying suspension. Honestly, you tend not to mind.

Is the ST the supermini king? Well, it is both the cheapest and the biggest bundle of fun – and that's without the officially approved Mountune kit, which takes the engine up to 212bhp for £599 without decimating the warranty. Expect to eat brake discs. In fact, you might as well get them on subscription, not just because you'll be going so fast but also because the torque vectoring relies on them, slowing the inside front wheel to enable those amazing direction changes. And this is where, for some, the Peugeot disputes the hegemony – with its diff always driving it onwards, you're never held back, never slowed down, something that will surely appeal to those who value outright progress over intimate immersion and flexible control. Either way, the old-stagers shade the upstarts, as the pricey Mini proves too cool to rule, and the Corsa still hasn't mastered the necessary table manners. 

@ir_427

VAUXHALL CORSA VXR PERFORMANCE PACK

Price £20,395

As tested £21,590

Engine 1598cc 16v turbocharged 4-cyl, 202bhp @ 5800rpm, 206lb ft @ 1900-5800rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive with Drexler limited slip differential

Suspension MacPherson struts front, torsion beam rear, Koni FSD dampers

Performance 6.5sec 0-62mph, 143mph, 37.7mpg, 174g/km CO2

Weight 1293kg

Rating ★★☆☆

FORD FIESTA ST

Price £17,545

As tested £20,515

Engine 1596cc 16v turbocharged 4-cyl, 180bhp @ 5700rpm, 214lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive with torque vectoring

Suspension MacPherson struts front, torsion beam rear

Performance 6.9sec 0-62mph, 139mph, 47.9mpg, 138g/km CO2

Weight 1163kg

Rating ★★★★★

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS AUTOMATIC

Price £24,380

As tested £31,945

Engine 1998cc 16v turbocharged 4-cyl, 228bhp @ 5200rpm, 236lb ft @ 1250rpm

Transmission Six-speed steptronic automatic, front-wheel drive with electronic differential lock control

Suspension MacPherson struts front, multi-link rear

Performance 6.1sec 0-62mph, 153mph, 49.6mpg, 133g/km CO2

Weight 1295kg

Rating ★★★★★

PEUGEOT 208 GTi 30TH

Price £21,995

As tested £22,145

Engine 1598cc 16v turbocharged 4-cyl, 205bhp @ 5800rpm, 221lb ft @ 1750rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive with Torsen limited slip differential

Suspension MacPherson struts front, torsion beam rear

Performance 6.5sec 0-62mph, 143mph, 52.3mpg, 125g/km CO2

Weight 1160kg

Rating ★★★★★



You're at Le Mans with a 650S LM, McLaren's nod to the F1's '95 win. Would you stay for the race,





Another

the LM in a car park? Of course you wouldn't. You'd drive until you couldn't drive any further

24 hours

Words Ben Miller Photography Charlie Magee





Steel brakes, diddy wheels and no driver aids on the F1. 650S boasts ceramics, ABS and oodles of grip



Air vents a work of art. La Sarthe circuit not bad either



F1 GTR a thing of beauty. But a gold and purple anodised gearlever? Really?



Ray-Ban Owners' Club get-togethers are always emotional affairs



All 50 Le Mans 650Ss are spoken for. On this evidence it's not hard to see why, despite the price premium



CIRCUIT DE LA SARTHE, LE MANS

1.14PM SATURDAY

I suppose when you won the world's greatest motor race at the first attempt you acquire some clout but, even so, I'm not sure quite how McLaren has swung this one. In less than two hours' time a waved tricolor will see the 83rd running of the 24 *Heures du Mans* get underway, and set in motion a compelling struggle for supremacy between Porsche and Audi. But first an armada of McLarens – a couple of P1s, a P1 GTR, two limited edition 650S Le Mans and a bewildering array of F1 GTRs – will run in a parade lap, on the full 8.4-mile circuit, with the chicanes removed from the Mulsanne, at a speed of test driver Chris Goodwin's choosing. And I'll be in it, driving one of the 650S LMs. The potential for infamy is extraordinary. The man who spun into an irreplaceable F1 GTR, carpet-bombed the Porsche curves with shards of historic carbonfibre and delayed the race start for 250,000 trackside spectators and a global TV audience would never be forgotten.

I'd be nervous if the scene in the holding area wasn't so surreal. Yannick Dalmas, one third of the triumphant '95 driver line-up together with Masanori Sekiya and JJ Lehto, sits impassively in the £1.98million, 986bhp hybrid P1 GTR, the car's buttercup yellow paint ablaze beneath a fierce midday sun. Behind him, Derek Bell is cool at the wheel of the equally yellow Harrods F1 GTR, its featherweight carbonfibre doors cocked skyward. Where 20 years ago frantic pit crew would have been lodged headfirst in the open door apertures, today its autograph hunters. And up at the front, Chris Goodwin looks genuinely excited to be driving the Ueno Clinic car, the machine that came home first 20 years ago and cemented the McLaren F1's status as the most remarkable supercar ever built.

'We didn't expect anything in '95,' says JJ Lehto, leaning casually against a '97 Longtail, the car the F1 GTR morphed into when rivals lost sight of the spirit of the GT rulebook and

instead stretched it to breaking point. 'We just thought we'd do the best we could and see what happened. I remember feeling good though – it was the first time I'd been 100% after my big F1 accident in 1994. It took me a year and a half to recover. And I liked the car from the beginning. The central driving position made it feel like a single-seater and the engine was the best I've ever used: the noise, the responsiveness, the torque. Yes it rolled a little at the back in corners but I quite liked that.'

I joke that it's very McLaren to have had a replica of his '95 Ueno Clinic race-suit made for a single parade lap. 'No, no, this is the original suit – I kept it,' explains the enviably lean and youthful-looking Finn, deadpan.

The BMW V12 in Goodwin's GTR shatters the silence and we scurry to our cars. Barriers are shifted, normally po-faced French marshals break into mile-wide smiles and suddenly we're on the circuit. The next few minutes are manic, wonderful and exhilarating. Goodwin's pace is more qualifying than pre-race parade, his F1 hustling through Tertre Rouge and slinging out onto the Mulsanne like he means business. In the 650S LM I'm trying to remember to breathe, working hard to enjoy the car and the moment without becoming *that man*. First impressions? The LM's any-rev drive is handy when you don't know where you're going, as is the car's prodigious front-end grip, and the carbon-ceramic brakes go from disinterested to mighty with a bit of heat.

As the race gets underway, I take my cue to leave. Perverse perhaps, but this car's too intriguing to leave in a car park while I drink until I can speak fluent French. On the way out the LM gets more attention than you might expect of a relatively restrained supercar shape rendered almost invisible ▶

Barriers are lifted, po-faced marshals break into smiles and suddenly we're on the circuit

McLaren 650S LeMans



Any time you lose during this carry-on you can win back come the launch



Weather gods read reports of the rain-lashed '95 race and came up trumps

The 650S that thinks it's an F1

WELL DONE US

'At McLaren Special Operations (MSO) we felt very strongly that we needed to do something to mark the 1995 victory, and what better way than a special edition 650S?' says MSO's James Banks. 'We're very close to the F1 – we worked on them then and we look after them still. The F1's designer, Peter Stevens, was involved in the process, which took a year from start to finish. All the work was done in-house – we're like a microcosm within McLaren, able to call on expertise in the wider business should we want to.'

PAINT

Very, very grey, which either sets the orange calipers off nicely or makes the car far too subtle, depending on how much attention you received as a child. Banks: 'With the colour, La Sarthe grey, we wanted to echo the livery of the Ueno Clinic car – it's a visual average of that car's two greys. Most of the 50 LMs are in the grey, with one in Harrods-inspired yellow and green and a couple in orange.'

WHEELS AND BRAKES

'We weren't sure whether this kind of five-spoke design would work on the 650S but they look fantastic,' says Banks. 'I can't claim it's any lighter than the standard 650S wheels but they look right.' The 650S LM features standard orange brake calipers. Choose P-Zero or track-ready P-Zero Corsa rubber.

Slack pit crew appears to lack flameproof overalls or urgency

ROOFTOP SNORKEL

'We'd done one previously, as a one-off for a customer, so we'd done the groundwork,' explains Banks. 'It was a lot of work because it channels induction air; it's not just cosmetic, or for cooling. It had to supply the right amount of air, to avoid overspooling the turbos. We also worked to ensure its shape didn't disrupt the boundary layer of air running over the car. It brings a little P1 to the 650S and more character.'

WHEELARCH VENTS

'We tried a couple of options with the vents in the carbonfibre front wheelarches. We looked at a more upright louvre, like those of the '97 F1 GTR, but settled on something more subtle inspired by the vents on the F1 LM. They help evacuate high-pressure air from the wheel wells, reducing lift.'



in metallic grey. The nods to the F1 GTR might be subtle – roof-top snorkel air intake, vented front wheelarches, five-spoke mag wheels (19in fronts; 20in rears), a smattering of exterior carbon (splitter, extended side-blades, airbrake, bigger diffuser) – but together they give the normally slightly amorphous 650S a more purposeful, undoubtedly F1-inspired silhouette. The production run of 50 cars, at £244,500 apiece, is sold out. Beneath the skin it's business as usual: a 640bhp twin-turbo V8 and a performance-obsessed carbonfibre chassis 10kg lighter than the standard 650S coupe's. And 24 hours to play with.

SOUTH OF CLERMONT-FERRAND

10.48PM SATURDAY

The wall of rain-laden cloud was waiting just south of *Tours* – a 1000ft wall of angry black cloud. As the 650S passed into it and the lights flicked on, we crossed from one world to another, from bright fields, easy miles and pretty sunsets to lagoons of standing water, the insistent pounding of rain on carbon roof and lip-chewing concentration. That was hours ago. It's still raining.

Back at Le Mans, Mark Webber's on a quadruple stint in his Porsche 919. Bless him. I'm into my eighth hour, helped by a supercar cockpit so right you wonder why most everyone else gets it so wrong. Crucially, the seats are superb – slim, supportive, anatomically perfect and, splashed with orange to liven things up, pretty stylish. The pedals are beautiful – to look at and to use. Slightly offset admittedly, with a brake pedal that begs to get to know your left foot, but given the forces at their control, rightly serious and industrial in look and feel. The alcantara-rimmed wheel looks wrong, with its fat boss and flat bottom, but feels perfect. After its oddly egg-shaped

rim, every subsequent wheel you hold feels chubby and nasty. Visibility, while not quite F1 good, is still widescreen enough to deliver some pretty panoramic views of both the world you're charging towards and the one you're leaving behind. Handy when you're trying to slide into a tollbooth without wrecking a magnesium rim, or overtake a struggling Renault 5 without collecting it.

The steering itself is, in Sport, the chassis' intermediate setting, a thing of wonder: light, with next to no self-centering effect, but beautifully direct and bright with feel. In Normal it's too light and a little vague, but since the chassis settings come as a package, Sport steering means Sport suspension too. Even so the 650S LM rides with astonishing pliancy, gliding over lumpy motorway tarmac like a fat-tired limousine. Cabin noise is nicely suppressed. Engine racket is little more than a murmur in seventh gear and, when you must change gear, the gearbox does so swiftly and smoothly, and with a delicious click of the one-piece casting that's almost – almost – as rewarding as a gearlever. If there's a slicker paddleshift gearbox, whether you're battering the tachometer's red line in an unseemly hurry or slurring lazily around in automatic mode, I haven't found it yet.

On the northern fringes of the *Cevennes* national park the motorway sheds lanes and get serious. The landscape, all monolithic rock faces and plunging gorges, closes in as the road weaves and climbs. I'm torn between cruising safely through the waterlogged curves and the need to crack on. The car makes the decision for me, feeling solid despite the conditions. I relax my grasp on the wheel, back the wiper off – rain streams from the ▶



Twin-turbo V8 no BMW V12 but it's still a monster, when you want it to be

**Beneath the skin it's
business as usual: a
640bhp twin-turbo V8**



Trusty atlas backs up IRIS nav. Seats back up to help your stiff frame get out

screen's dual-compound curves just fine without it – and trust the car, carving up the valley as the ever-ready V8 counters the gradient without so much as raising its voice. In a cabin almost silent bar the muffled roar of thousands of litres of displaced water and the insistent, increasingly manic chatter of my own exhausted thoughts, all is serene. A speed camera flashes. I go faster, trying to be more JJ.

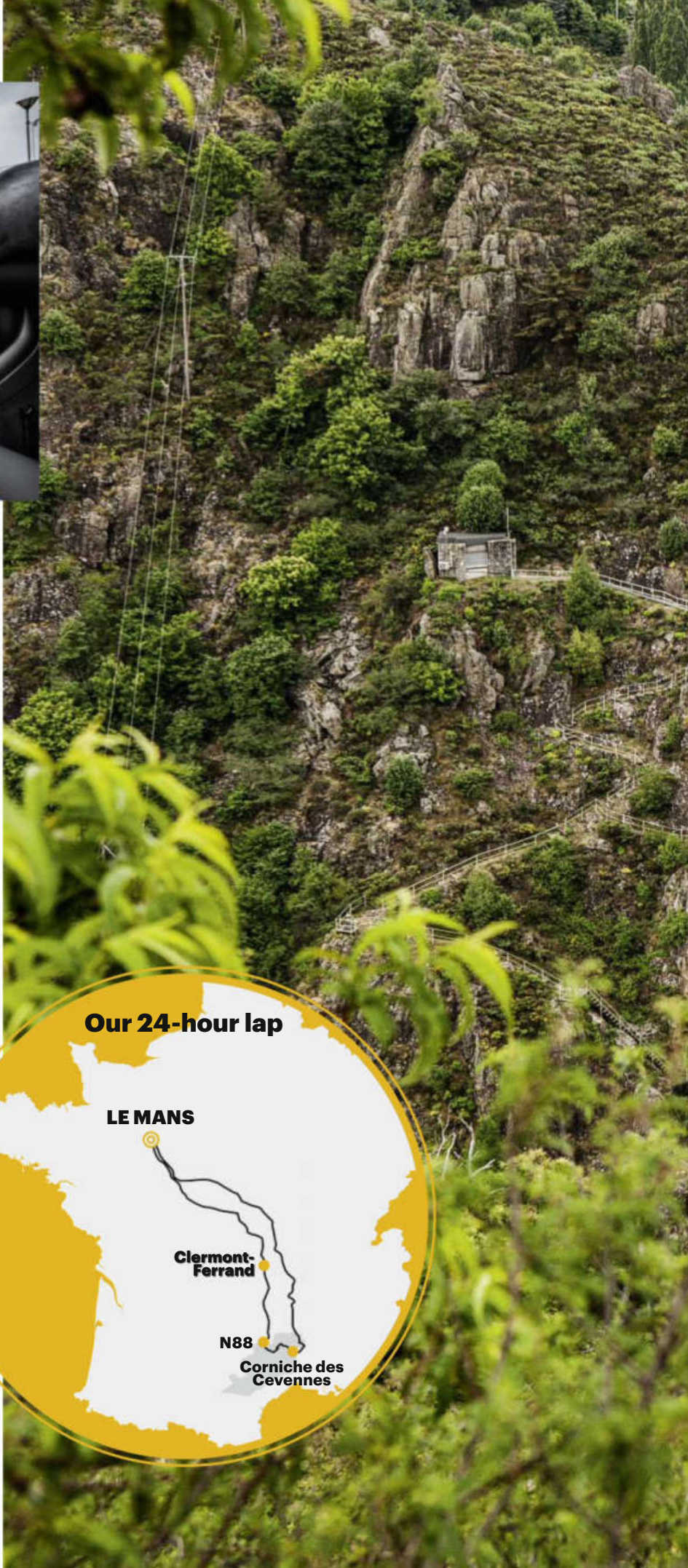
'In '95 the rain in the night was really good for me,' Lehto had told me earlier. 'Over 24 hours you have the time to find the right line for the wet. You find the grip, the right gear and the rhythm, and it gets easier. I didn't really push over the limit, I was driving comfortably, but the guys in the pits weren't sure. They came over the radio saying, 'you're 30 seconds faster than everyone else – are you sure about this?' I told them 'I'm sure, don't worry!'


Don't worry.

SOMEWHERE ON THE N88 6.49AM SUNDAY

I don't normally do this. I don't normally drive like this. Maybe it's my breakfast, a hallucinogenic blend of coffee milk and Haribo. Maybe it's a product of the long hours of motorway-mile anticipation, spiked with fatigue. Whatever, the result is a hypnotic couple of hours on the most insanely sinuous N-roads, their endless corners running one into another over hundreds of kilometres of rugged, apparently unpopulated rural France. Any lingering doubts about the wisdom of swerving the race for this drive are gone.

Now the 650S LM feels nothing like the hushed, serenely suspended conveyance I climbed from just a few hours before. With the chassis and powertrain in Sport the car is taut, hair-trigger responsive – lag, if you're in anything like the right gear, just isn't a factor – and apparently without limits when it comes to the task of changing direction at speed. I brake as late as I dare, clock that big carbon airbrake go vertical in the mirror, turn the wheel and somehow know that the McLaren will grip. Lean on its roll-free, grip-laden mid-corner poise and then decide how silly you want to be. Wait until the car's straight before deploying the V8 and firing up to speed, or bring in the throttle early, ease off the lock as the electronics manage the wheelspin and the yaw angle, then disappear up the road convinced you're a kind of late-blooming, slightly bigger-boned JJ Lehto, albeit one cruelly denied your big ▶



An aerial photograph showing a winding asphalt road built on top of a large concrete dam. The road curves sharply to the right, following the edge of the dam. A dark-colored car is visible on the road. The dam is situated next to a large body of water, and the surrounding landscape is rocky and forested. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**I don't normally
drive like this.
Hypnotic hours on
the most insanely
sinuous N-roads**



Splendid steering wheel is entirely free of buttons – a good thing

After 24 hours and less sleep than most Spaniards manage in a lunch hour, I'm shattered





The No17 Porsche came home second, no doubt held back by Hartley's hair



Strewn like unconscious race fans on the camping fields of Sunday afternoon



F1 scoop, P1 face, and a 12C's ass, but 650S Le Mans is a mighty mutant

racing break. The way in which the McLaren makes you comfortable with its towering potential – for railing around corners and for gaining and losing faintly ridiculous speeds – is mesmerising and terrifying in equal measure. At the *Corniche des Cevennes* the leash goes taut, the clock on the neat, ultra-crisp IRIS display urging a 180-degree change of direction and a return to Le Mans, perhaps in time to see the flag fall.

160KM SOUTHEAST OF LE MANS 11.53PM SUNDAY

Truly, tests of restraint come no sterner than this. The 650S LM and I are hurrying north along big, empty roads, the vast landscape's rural tapestry broken only by the road and the occasional grain store the size of a cathedral. Traffic is sparse, visibility apparently limited only by the curvature of the earth and, after 24 hours, 1000 miles and less sleep than most Spaniards manage in a lunch hour, I'm shattered. North of Le Mans, when the faithful stream for the Channel ports in a couple of hours' time, there won't be the space to speed, nor any sense in doing so, given the police presence. But here we've the world to ourselves.

Drop the V8 into the foothills of its thick, unrelenting power curve. Push to the floor that exquisite alloy pedal. The crushing, insistent change of state you expect, surreal though it is with intangible turbo torque. The noise – a manic storm of induction roar, high-rev whine and mournful, fluttering turbos – you don't. The LM's carbonfibre snorkel effectively wires your brain to the bowels of the engine, a kind of sonic shortcut from inner ear to inlet tract. If you struggle with the standard

650S's slightly cool, standoff-ish demeanour, the LM's induction system is the cure. Over-taking, regardless of the number of cars to be passed, their speed or the space available, is as easy as breathing.

CIRCUIT DE LA SARTHE, LE MANS 4.27PM SUNDAY

The roads out are as packed as the roads in are desolate. A post-race high hangs over this most magical of circuits. In Porsche's trucks Webber, Hulkenberg and friends are enjoying their first beer of the weekend and discussing how to make the 919 faster and stronger for 2016. In McLaren's temporary MTC (a couple of admittedly very clean trucks and an awning; no lake), I find Lehto, set for the journey home. He's bemused that I've entirely missed a thrilling Le Mans 24 hours but seems genuinely interested in the grimy, bug-smear 650S LM.

'I drove it for the first time coming here this weekend,' he tells me. 'I liked it. It's very quiet, very civilised. You can drive the bumpy roads no problem, and when you start to drive faster you can stiffen up the suspension. Everything is so McLaren, so Ron: the graphics on the screen, the perfect stitching, the lovely steering wheel. And I like the engine. Nice car. Maybe McLaren would do me a price on one?'

For you JJ, I'm sure.

McLAREN 650S LE MANS

Price £244,500

Engine 3799cc 32v twin-turbo V8, 641bhp @ 7500rpm, 500lb ft @ 6000rpm

Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch auto, rear-wheel drive

Suspension Aluminium double wishbones front and rear

Performance 3.0sec

0-62mph, 207mph, 24.2mpg (claimed), 19.2mpg (tested)

Length/width/height 4512/2093/1224mm

Weight/made from 1320kg (dry)/carbonfibre & aluminium

Rating ★★★★★

ICON BUYER.

Serious used car temptation, from £40k sports cars to choosing a good Ferrari

NEW vs USED

New Audi TTS vs used Porsche 911 C4S

The new TT, finally, offers enough to the driver to make the conclusion of this test anything but foregone. For £40k, which is the right choice?

Words Ben Barry | Photography Alex Tapley





MOST AUDI TT drivers dream of owning a Porsche 911, but find themselves £43k short when new. Throw a used 911 into the equation and things get much more achievable. So today we're pitching the top-spec TTS against the 911 C4S. Both have over 300bhp, use all-wheel drive to hit 62mph in under five seconds and offer 2+2 seating to give families a get-out-of-jail-free card. A 911 for the price of a TT? If it sounds like a no-brainer, there's plenty to recommend the Audi.

The third-generation TT is a much better drive than its predecessors, diving into corners like a US Marine tackling a heavily armed Moroccan, and offering both involvement and Superglue traction thanks to fast-acting Haldex all-wheel drive.

Audi's old 3.2-litre VR6 might seem a preferable flat-six substitute, but the new turbo four puts less weight in the nose for better acceleration and sharper handling, improves mpg and sounds better than the same unit in CAR's Golf R. Pair it with the DSG gearbox and you'll cover ground like you're riding a traveller. Only the low-speed fidget on our car's 20-inch rims disappoints.

Inside, Virtual Cockpit tops off one of the most seductive of all interiors. It's a TFT screen that puts the sat-nav in the instrument binnacle and allows you to configure the dials to suit. For the iPhone generation, it brings an appeal the 911 can't counter.

The 997-generation 911 C4S starts below £30k for a 2005-2008 car showing 50k miles, but that's quite a leap for a new buyer accustomed to three-year deals. Instead, it's the 2008-2012 '997.2' that lands firmly in TTS territory, updating the 997 with direct-injection, revised suspension, freshened sat-nav, optional PDK gearbox and more.

They're yours from around £40k, but we're testing

a 2009 model from specialists Paragon (01825 830424). It's done 27,000 miles, offers sat-nav, adaptive dampers and sports exhaust, and was up at £47,995 – comparable to our £46.5k-with-options TTS – but has since sold.

The 911's low-set driving position is perfect, the cabin architecture timelessly appealing, and the double-stitched leather shrugs off wear-and-tear. The sat-nav has aged, but it's still perfectly serviceable.

And those looks: doe-eyed headlights, slinky glasshouse, the way the rear screen plunges to emphasise this wider Carrera body's arch cleavage; it's almost indecent.

At the wheel you notice the extra steering weight when you turn and accelerate thanks to the front driveshafts, a ride that's more mature than the TT's, and the 997.2 is also characterised by an improved composure over bumpy back roads. The soundtrack dominates: all breathy rasps at low rpms, and the ▶

Porsche vs Audi: the numbers

PORSCHE 911 C4S (997.2)

- **Price** £42,000 (2009, 35,000 miles)
- **Engine** 3800cc 24v flat-six, 379bhp @ 6500rpm, 310lb ft @ 4400rpm
- **Transmission** 6-speed manual, all-wheel drive
- **Performance** 4.7sec 0-62mph, 185mph, 26mpg, 247g/km CO2
- **Suspension** MacPherson strut front, multi-link rear
- **Weight/made from** 1555kg/steel
- **Length/width/height** 4435/1852/1300mm
- **On sale** 2008-2012

AUDI TTS

- **Price** £40,310
- **Engine** 1984cc 16v turbo four-cylinder, 306bhp @ 5800rpm, 280lb ft @ 1800rpm
- **Transmission** 6-speed dual-clutch auto, all-wheel drive
- **Performance** 4.6sec 0-62mph, 155mph, 40.9mpg, 159g/km CO2
- **Suspension** MacPherson strut front, multi-link rear
- **Weight/made from** 1385kg/steel
- **Length/width/height** 4177/1832/1343mm
- **On sale** Now



Before you judge, consider this. One will definitely have been driven hard, the other's factory fresh and built like a bank vault...

blur of noise and speed as you wind to 7200rpm is like being strapped to a Catherine Wheel.

The stubby manual gearlever is slick and light, if ever so slightly baggy, but I like the interaction of meaty clutch, crisp throttle and reassuring brake pedal. I wouldn't swap it for the PDK with those confusing paddles they used to fit until we all complained.

Does a 911 need all-wheel drive? Not in the dry, but if a regular Carrera's rear-engined, rear-drive dynamics have you quivering, the C4S is an ideal gateway-drug to the most enduring sports car of all time.

> SERVICING & RUNNING COSTS

Porsche 911 servicing is based on two-year/20k intervals, alternating between minor (oil/filter swap, pollen filter, £396 at Paragon) and major services (minor, plus air filter, remove rear wheels and discs to clean, adjust handbrake, from £528). Buying through Paragon or the Porsche Approved Used Scheme ensures upcoming services are performed prior to purchase.

The poly belt that drives ancillaries is checked at the four-year service, replaced for £138 at six. Paragon quotes £599 for front discs, pads and replacing the brake fluid, £597 for the rears.

Audi offers both fixed and flexible TTS servicing. Fixed servicing is suitable for harder use, short city trips and sub-10k annual mileages. You'll get an oil-change service every 9000 miles or annually (circa £140), an inspection service every 19,000 miles or two-yearly (circa £145). Flexible servicing extends the intervals up to 19,000 miles/two years. Or try the three-year/30k miles service package. It starts from £16.50 monthly (service costs only), rising to £43.60 (servicing, maintenance, tyres).

Based on a 40-year-old with a speed-camera spidey sense, Adrian Flux Insurance quotes £300 (£250 excess) for the TTS, £344.50 (£500 excess) the 911.

> RELIABILITY

Paragon have experienced the piston bore-score issues that are often cited with 997s, but stress this has been restricted to the 997.1, not the 997.2. And what of the sudden intermediate-shaft bearing failure that gives owners sleepless nights? Never seen it on a 997.1, they say, and 997.2s don't have one.

Exhaust-flange bolts account for most unscheduled visits – you'll pay £180 for the parts and 1.5 hours' labour to remedy. A word of warning, however: the air-con condensers and radiators will rot if you don't clear the leaf-mulch that accumulates in the front bumper intakes. You'll pay around £270 plus fitting for each a/c condenser, £252 for radiators.

Clonky top mounts and lower arms are giveaways for worn suspension, and look for lipped brake discs and heavy brake-dust deposits in the cross-drilled brakes, a sign that a potential purchase has been given the spanking the chassis clearly deserves.

The TTS comes with a three-year/60,000-mile warranty, but can be upgraded to four years/75,000 miles for £385, or five years, 90,000 miles for £905.

MY AUDI TTs

JAMES HARPER

'I love the TT's menacing design, but the interior was the deal-maker for me: the way the minimalist lines combine with Virtual Cockpit is second to none. To the high standard spec I added the technology pack, comfort and sound pack, cruise control and privacy glass. I'd like to tune the car in future, but for now I don't want to lose the warranty safety net. I opted out of most of Audi's after-sales packages; the car will be serviced by a specialist, the paint protected by a professional detailer. Already looking forward to the Wothersee show next year!'

MY PORSCHE 911 C4S (997)

ROSS JOLLY

'Having recently sold my classic 930 Supersport, I was seeking a nice C4S or Turbo 997. I bought a 997.1 C4S from my local Porsche dealer and was instantly impressed: low miles (42k), fully loaded with £25k of extras and it looked great in Guards Red with full factory Aerokit. The Turbo body really accentuates the 911 look, and the sports exhaust adds to the sporty sound. I cover around 3000 miles a year and I'm averaging 26-28mpg.'

This 911 found a new composure over bumpy roads that the TT can't match



TT's trumpeted Virtual Cockpit is the darling of the iPhone generation. Very cool



911 is more analogue, and not just because of the manual 'box. Equally cool




> KEY OPTIONS

Popular 911 options included the PDK dual-clutch transmission (£2338 at the time), top-spec PCM sat-nav (£1284), sun-roof (£846), Bose sounds (£768), metallic paint (£602), 19-inch alloys (£555), sports seats (£306), universal audio connection (£222) and heated seats (£269). The Sport Chrono Package Plus (£1259) tweaks throttle response, stability-control intervention and the adjustable shocks, and brings more aggressive PDK mapping. Spot it by the stopwatch on the dash.

Desirable TT options include 20-inch rims (£850), Bang & Olufsen stereo (£895), cruise control (£295), reversing camera (£450), electric front seats (£995), LED headlights (£945), heated, folding mirrors (£215). Solid paint finishes are no-cost, but all metallic and pearls are £550. Nappa leather and Virtual Cockpit is standard, but you can upgrade to MMI Navigation Plus with 3D map display, 10GB music storage, voice control, wi-fi hotspot and internet connection at £1795.

> VERDICT

For arguably the first time in three generations, the Audi TT – fast, poised, involving too – is a proper sports car. And if you prize cutting-edge design and technology, the kudos of a 15-plate, and a fixed-cost three-year deal, it's the choice for you.

But I'd buy the 911. It offers a significantly more exotic driving experience, all topped off by one of the most charismatic, exciting engines ever created. Perhaps the best thing about Stuttgart's icon is its ease of use: you want to take a 911 to the shops as much as the track. The fact that it's likely to hold its value far better than the TT just seals the deal. 

@IamBenBarry



Audi's 20in alloys add beauty with one hand and steal ride quality with the other. Porsche's optional 19s are all you need

Thoroughbred or unbroken colt? Conceptually identical, emotionally polarised



THANKS: PARAGON (PARAGONGB.COM, 01825 830424), PORSCHECLUBGB.COM, JAMES HARPER @HKRPZ



MY PERSONAL ICON

BMW CSI

Unrivalled for elegance and sophistication according to besotted owner **Ben Redgrove**



> **'I'VE WANTED ONE** of these for 22 years. I've been lucky

enough to own some great cars, including a couple of Astons – a DB7 and a Vanquish – but one I remembered fondly was a rare Alpina 2002Ti I had, in Inca orange with the black bonnet. It was so much fun to drive – every roundabout was an opportunity to either slide it beautifully or end up facing the way I'd come. It made me want another 1970s BMW.'

> **'I'VE ALWAYS ADMIRERD** the CSI. I love 280SL Mercs too but I missed the boat on those. The CSI is a very handsome, very elegant car, with that amazing glasshouse and slim, stylish pillars. I've dreamed of owning one for years but started looking seriously about a year ago. I found this

one through 4 Star Classics [4starclassics.com]. It's a right-hand-drive 1973 car in silver with blue leather. I'd have preferred black but I liked the fact that this car is mechanically sound. It'll need a bit of work in a few years' time – I'd rather do that than watch it deteriorate – but it's ready to drive and to enjoy.'

> **'I DID 250** miles in it the day I picked it up. I left 4 Star Classics, filled it with fuel and didn't stop driving it until I needed fuel again. It's wonderful. On that day I drove back roads, A-roads and motorways and it handled everything with an air of style and sophistication – it's a real silver fox. The interior's gorgeous, everybody loves the car as it drives past, it handles well and the ride's much, much better than my daily driver, a Defender...'

> **'THERE ARE A** few things to sort out but for now I just want to enjoy it – the restoration can wait. I'd really love to drive it over to Italy, to see my daughter. It might be 42 years old but the CSI's the perfect car for the journey.'

One we found

1974 CSI, 96k miles, silver with dark blue leather, £23k



PERSONAL DEALER

The search for a life-changing Ferrari

Jeff Fosker of Ferrari specialists Foskers spends every waking moment thinking about Maranello metal. Here are his hot tips
Interview by **Ben Miller**



£70k-110k, 1994-1999 | **F355 Berlinetta**

3496cc V8, 375bhp, 4.7sec 0-62mph, 183mph

➤ **Is this a good idea?** 'This is the definitive modern classic Ferrari. Some classic Ferraris are only as fast as a hot hatch these days but the 355 can still hold its own as a sports car. It also makes a noise like an F1 car as you wind it to the redline, and it's a timeless shape – you won't find anyone who doesn't think the 355 is beautiful.'

➤ **How much?** 'The market now regards this car as a genuine icon, so an 18,000-mile UK car in Rosso Corsa with cream hide and a manual gearbox will cost £100,000 or more.'

➤ **What's going to break?** 'The exhaust manifold is a weak point, being prone to corrosion, cracking and bowing. A car driven with a damaged manifold will run too hot, potentially damaging the valves. Some cars will have replacement manifolds. Others have had theirs welded, which is fine so long as it's been done properly by a respected specialist. The paint can bubble around the rear buttresses. It tends to happen every five or six years and it's a £1200 fix.'

➤ **Crippling running costs?**

'The annual service costs £720, the bigger 12,500-mile service £1200 and the engine-out cambelt service £1700.'



£80k-£180k, 1975-1985

308 GTB/GTS

2926cc V8, 252bhp, 8.1sec 0-60mph, 159mph

➤ **Is this a good idea?**

'Just a gorgeous classic car, and the first mid-engined two-seater V8 Ferrari.'

➤ **How much?**

'£180k for a perfect fibreglass-bodied car. The sweet spot is the cheaper carburettor steel-bodied car.'

➤ **What's going to break?**

'Bodywork corrosion is the problem. It's not unusual to see evidence of minor bodywork repairs but it won't affect a car's value.'

➤ **Crippling running costs?**

'Put aside £2k a year. Many are still on 14in wheels, so at least tyres are cheap.'



£280k-£350k, 2005

575M Superamerica

5748cc V12, 533bhp, 4.3sec 0-60mph, 199mph

➤ **Is this a good idea?**

'A little leftfield but it's an amazing and rare car, and I think values will soar soon.'

➤ **How much?**

'£300k or so, but values will rise. The HGTC package (stiffer suspension, sports exhaust, huge carbon-ceramic brakes) is nice to have – makes a good car fantastic.'

➤ **What's going to break?**

'They're pretty reliable but check the roof carefully. Glass panels can show signs of delamination. A new roof is about £19k.'

➤ **Crippling running costs?**

'Budget £2.5k a year for maintenance. Rear tyre wear can be heavy.'

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NOW WITHIN REACH

Nissan GT-R

A bargain when new, Nissan's ballistic missile is now Volvo XC60 money

➤ **NISSAN KEPT US**

waiting for six years but the GT-R was worth it. With eyeball-flattening pace, needle-sharp dynamics and four seats, it's a truly multi-faceted supercar. To reinforce its pedigree, factory driver Toshio Suzuki did a 7:29 'Ring lap time. And it cost just £56,795 new...

➤ **THE GT-R LOOKS** like a clenched fist, the cockpit wouldn't look out of place in a jet fighter and it bristles with tech. The 3799cc V6, fed by twin IHI blowers, delivers 473bhp at 6400rpm and 432lb ft of torque that sledgehammers in at 3200rpm.



One
we found

2009 GT-R Premium,
35,000 miles, titanium
grey, one owner from
new, **£34,990**

➤ **THE ALL-WHEEL-DRIVE** system uses electronics and hydraulic clutches to shift all that grunt to the right tyres at the right time. And the double-clutch transmission machine-guns its way through cogs quicker than your fingers can tap the paddles.

➤ **IT'S A 1740KG** four-seater coupe with the agility of an Elise and the pace of a Ferrari. Tempting enough, but it's yours for as little as £35k – and that's for a meticulously maintained R35B Premium and Black Edition. Beyond tempting.

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FROM MAYBE A kilometre back, it's difficult to tell if it's a 1-series or 3-series convertible, meandering at about 100mph in the outside lane. In the time it takes to process that thought, it resolves to become clearly a 1-series. Still

meandering. I start flashing the headlights. I keep flashing the headlights. I'm going to have to lift. I lift. *Then* it moves – and my right foot is back to the floor before it's even fully evacuated the lane. Dusk is looming, and the sensible version of my consciousness, currently cowering somewhere at the very back of my brain, presumably in the vicinity of the thickest part of my skull, stutters that this probably is the last shot at this ridiculous enterprise. Go. Go go go!

Something has been bothering me about the Huracan since the day it arrived. With 8166 miles on the clock, obviously it had been driven – and being a Lamborghini, obviously it had been driven hard. But it was ever so slightly galling to flip through the supplementary displays at the periphery of the digital instrument panel and discover that the highest recorded speed was 182mph.

Now, while that display option is easily hidden – it's not often I need the accompanying lap timer on the A14 – the knowledge that some other bugger has driven 'my' car not just faster than me but very fast indeed started to niggle. Since life is short and I won't have the keys to a Huracan forever, I began to ponder how to make amends. I'm not especially competitive, so this only happened immediately.

Taking it to a v-max straight-line event seemed too supercar boys club and boring – plus I can't imagine myself ever getting an invite. We did briefly look at closing a suitable stretch of the UK road network, but it turns out those new regs for motorsport on public tarmac don't apply in this instance. Which left one option. Germany.

It didn't take much googling to find that the best candidate for derestricted autobahn within easy reach of the UK is the A5 heading south out of Hattenbach. This rang a vague bell, and with a little more digging I soon learned that the A5 was once known as 'the Führer's autobahn' – being the first Reichsautobahn built under Hitler's rule (though not actually the first in Germany). More significantly, the initial section constructed, ▶

Life in the very, very fast lane

According to the car's computer, our Huracan has at some point in its life reached 182mph. Red rag to a bull? Yep. We resolved to go even quicker. **By CJ Hubbard**

While waiting for those
120mph dawdlers to
clear, CJ rehearses his
resignation speech
from the Politically
Correct Society

The knowledge that some
other bugger had driven
'my' car very fast indeed
started to niggle



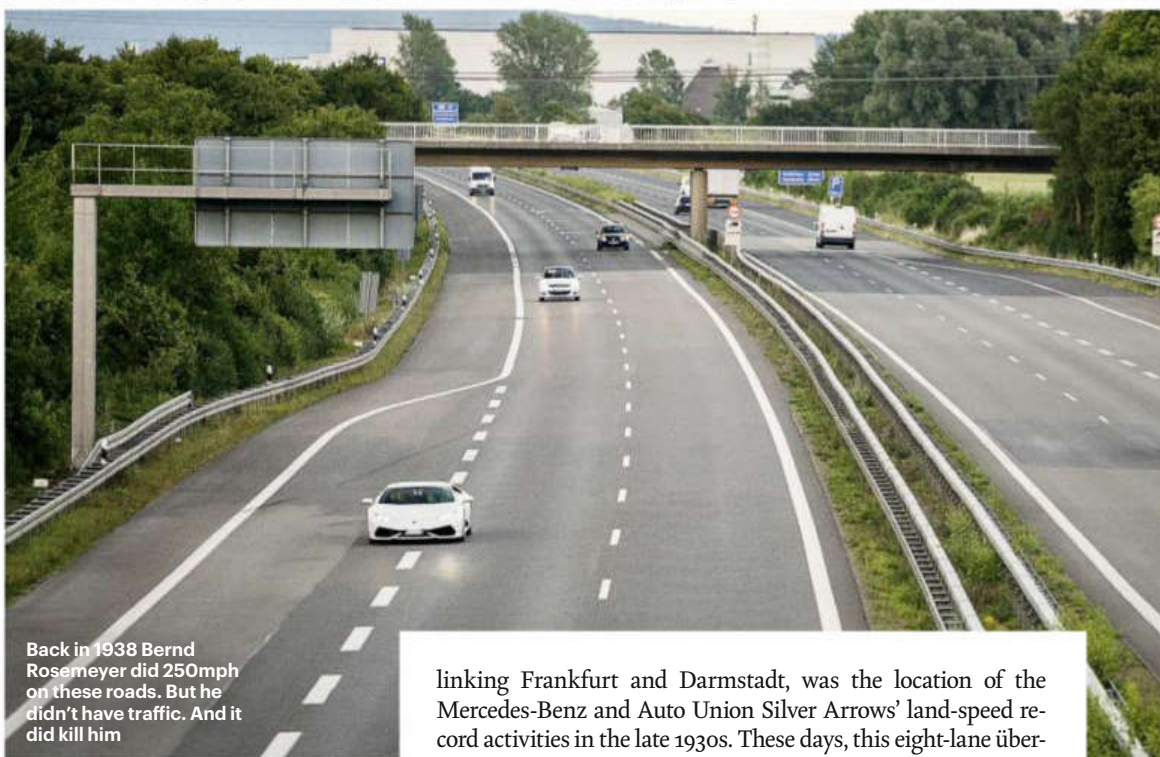


The next time he's this close to a lorry's rear he'll be doing 140mph

Bernd Rosemeyer: martyr to speed



WHEN Bernd Rosemeyer was killed aged 29, he'd been racing cars for just three years – nearly beating the German great Rudolf Caracciola at the Nürburgring in only his second race, and winning the European driving championship (the '30s' equivalent of F1) in his second season. Many compare him to Stefan Bellof; both were masters of the Green Hell, both had no fear of death... and both died at the wheel of a racing car. Rosemeyer's speed records stand out. In 1937, he became the first man to top 400km/h (248.5mph) on a public road – and also averaged 233.9mph over 10 miles on an autobahn.



Back in 1938 Bernd Rosemeyer did 250mph on these roads. But he didn't have traffic. And it did kill him

linking Frankfurt and Darmstadt, was the location of the Mercedes-Benz and Auto Union Silver Arrows' land-speed record activities in the late 1930s. These days, this eight-lane überbahn is known in some quarters as the Frankfurt drag strip.

Was I really about to try and exceed 182mph – a speed almost certainly set on track during the Huracan's press activities prior to its arrival at CAR – on a public highway?

Lest you think this incredibly reckless, let me disabuse you: it's not just reckless, it's downright dangerous. Which will hopefully lead you to understand that I wasn't taking it lightly. On 28 January 1938 Rudolf Caracciola wound his Mercedes-Benz W125 Rekordwagen up so hard he achieved an *average speed* of 268.9mph over the flying kilometre and 268.7mph over the flying mile on this very motorway, new world records both; later the same day, Bernd Rosemeyer was killed trying to beat him, when something no-one entirely understands sent his Auto Union V16 Streamliner into the scenery at between 250 and 280mph. The Huracan is by no means that fast, of course, and it has all the advantages of modern aerodynamics – but Caracciola and Rosemeyer weren't in traffic.

Precautions are paramount. This meant taking blatant advantage of our relationship with Lamborghini UK to have the Huracan thoroughly checked over by Lamborghini London before setting off. We weren't explicit about what we planned to



Trad restaurant a good choice for lunch. Drive-thru not an option at these speeds

do – so no blame can be attached to either of them – but we did say we were heading for Germany and wanted to make sure the car was firing on all cylinders physically and metaphorically. I also became mildly obsessed with checking the tyre pressures, no matter that the Huracan has an on-board monitoring system. Blame last month's puncture and a healthily overactive imagination.

I was also careful not to make the speed the be-all and end-all of the trip, adding some sightseeing activity as part of the adventure. With hotels and ferries booked – the ferry being judged far less of a threat to those precious 19-inch wheels – and photographer Alex fully apprised of what he was letting himself in for, we were on our way. Amazingly, all his gear went in the front, leaving the space behind the seats free for the stuffing of our archetypal squashy bags. We swallow up most of Belgium in a single massive lunge, arriving at our hotel in Verviers late but relatively unruffled. I optimistically reset that max speed indicator. No going back now.

A quick blat round the old Spa-Francorchamps street circuit does wonders for your perspective. Particularly in the rain. So it's with cool heads that we turn towards Germany's limit-free paradise in the morning – but with over 160 miles to cover to get to Frankfurt, once we cross the border I'm soon taking advantage of every derestricted sign. While these ghost-like cousins of the UK's national limit indicators supposedly only mean flat-out in fine weather, I have to get a feel for the Huracan's behaviour at higher velocities. And besides, we're in danger of being an obstruction if we don't get a wriggle on.

For there's further perspective on this idiotic endeavour once you're running at speed on the autobahn – which is that the Germans really do love to drive fast. As the precipitation fades I quickly find that if I'm not right back on it the instant the traffic clears I'm gapped by the 320d in front and have the Audi V6 TDI behind practically inside the engine compartment, diagnosing the fault with the Huracan's 602bhp V10. The sense that you're doing something illicit is swiftly replaced by a calm, concentrated normality, where 120mph becomes *de rigueur* and you're frustrated by anyone doing anything less.

The Huracan is happy to go faster. Much faster. I'd almost reached such a point of familiarity with this car that I wasn't sure it could properly surprise me anymore – but the first time I fully give it the beans at over 130mph I have to make a rapid readjustment. It is just incorrigibly ferocious. The engine screams, Alex nearly drops his camera, the Audi goes backwards, and my grin risks dislocating my jaw. Even before we reach the Frankfurt zone of the A5 I've already established that 160mph is easy, and 180mph well within grasp – though it's also apparent that much more than that is going to require quite a bit of room. Not because the Lamborghini gets dramatically slower; rather because these speeds eat up a hell of a lot of road.

And there are eight lanes outside Frankfurt for a reason: huge amounts of traffic. While this doesn't seem to be slowing down the locals and the A5 is so incredibly straight we manage a couple of 180mph passes, we decide to stop and regroup. I deliberately seek out the Bornbruch rest area, because hidden in the woods just beyond it is the Rosemeyer memorial, at the spot where he crashed. A moment's silence, please.

Suitably cowed, we elect to abandon the congestion and make a dash to the Sinsheim Auto & Technik Museum instead,

Bull meets bull at the Sinsheim Plane & Cattle Museum. Eh?



where we stare at the Concorde and Tupolev Tu-144 mounted on the roof. Photography eats up further daylight, and soon we realise that with six hours of driving between us and our overnight in Bruges, regretfully we've got to head for home.

The traffic is lighter, and because I've been driving at such sustained high speeds all day, 120mph now feels like a cruise – awareness extended so much further up the road, I start contemplating whether everyone should be forced to drive as fast as they can occasionally, just to make everyday speeds safer. With the Huracan's dynamic steering keeping it rock steady and the ceramic brakes holding my hand, it's as if I've got all in the anticipation time in world. We plunge across Germany like... well, like a white arrow.

Then the moment arrives. Like some kind of corny movie set-up, just as the sun drops below the treeline we crest a hill to find dead straight derestricted dual carriageway that's almost empty – the vague shape of a BMW in the distance. Accelerator mashed, that shape isn't so vague anymore. And it isn't getting out of the way. The road rises beyond it, then curves quite definitely to the right, so for the first time in the trip I find the headlight flasher with my thumb. Can only imagine the rear-view mirror madness the Huracan represents at this closing velocity. The BMW gets the message just as I'm preparing to fully abort, and I punch my right foot back to the carpet.

A sneaky glance tells me the gearbox automatically upshifts from sixth to seventh at 183mph – yes! – but I keep it pinned until I think – I think – I see 190 flash up on the digital speedo. Then it's hard on the carbons to make the turn at the top of the hill with a decent margin of safety. Phew. Alex and I uncoil slightly, as I back the Lambo down and check the max speed display. 190mph. Uphill. Flipping yes. We've done it. Best not to wonder if we'd have hit 200 if that 1-series hadn't been in the way.

©@ir_427

From the driving seat

- V10 mighty at high three figure speeds
- Dynamic steering super stable at high three figure speeds
- WOT upshifts from 6th to 7th at 183mph
- Seats aren't getting any softer
- Still wish you could tailor the driving modes

⬇ Maybe switch this off when back in the UK?



LOGBOOK LAMBORGHINI HURACAN LP610-4

- **Engine** 5204cc dual-injection V10, 602bhp @ 8250rpm, 413lb ft @ 6500rpm
- **Gearbox** 7-speed dual-clutch, all-wheel drive
- **Stats** 3.2sec 0-62mph, 202mph, 290g/km CO2
- **Price** £186,760
- **As tested** £224,836
- **Miles this month** 1455
- **Total miles** 13,369
- **Our mpg** 16.0
- **Official mpg** 22.6
- **Fuel this month** £503.73
- **Extra costs** £0

How we specced our 500X

Nav Pack £1000

A bigger touchscreen sat-nav, plus the all-important DAB radio

HiFi by Beats £600

An upgraded audio system, made famous by a man with questionable medical credentials

Visibility Pack £200

Rain-sensing wipers, plus auto-dimming mirrors that fold using electricity

Comfort Pack £250

Keyless entry, a front armrest, and adjustable lumbar support for my seat

Comfort Pack Plus £100

Don't say I'm not good to you darling: height adjustment for the front passenger seat



Really just a Fiat 500 on Viagra?

Or maybe it's steroids. Either way, this contrived, engorged SUV has its work cut out to impress us. **By Ben Pulman**

HELLO
MONTH 1
FIAT 500X

I KNOW THAT in the 21st century the Beetle has ballooned, the Mini is anything but, and even the 500 is no longer a *bambino*, but this is ridiculous. How can a little Italian icon now also be over four metres long and flogged

by Fiat as a crossover?

Which shows what I know. Fiat's won the lottery with those three numbers. In the eight years since it launched the 500 (the one that anyone under 30 thinks is the original) over 1.5 million have been sold, with 250,000 finding homes in the UK. Heck, Fiat's only bothered to treat its little city car to a facelift in the past few weeks, whereas most other manufacturers would by now have launched an all-new replacement and facelifted that. In fact, Fiat reckons it's onto such a winner with those triple digits that over half its range is now labelled as a 500 of some variety. Hence this, the 500X.

Whether you call it a 4x4, an SUV, or a crossover, it's entering into a market segment that's only going one way. By 2020 the 500X and its small ilk are expected to jump from a 2% to 7% market share in the UK, culminating in a total of nearly 200k annual sales. It's already happening: the Nissan Juke proved so popular in 2014 it helped push the Mini and BMW 3-series out of the top ten sales chart. Perennial best-sellers the pair of them, yet their decline highlights exactly where buyers are migrating from.

So, first impressions on my new wheels for the foreseeable?

Well actually, I went along to the UK media launch of the 500X a few months back, to try petrol and diesel power, 17 and 18in wheels, and manual and auto transmission options. More on what I picked in a moment, but fearing the flimsiness of a Panda wrapped in another skin I was genuinely impressed by the quality of the interior, the touchscreen multimedia system, and the gearbox (the latter is usually something Fiat doesn't bother to engineer). And, compared with the Mini, the seats were so much more comfortable, while the most obvious boon was extra space in the back and in the boot.

Fast forward a few months to the arrival of my car and another plus versus the little Anglo-German hatch is a pliant ride (I stuck with the standard 17s). As for the rest of it, well prices start at £14,595, but that's for a basic-spec Pop model with a 1.6-litre petrol, to sucker you through the showroom door. The fancier 1.4 MultiAir (more powerful, more economical) can't be had with anything less than the mid-level Pop Star spec, and that's £17,595. Oh, you want diesel, like the majority of customers? Immediately £19,095. And what about the 'off-road' bodykit so it actually looks like a crossover rather than a 500 hoarding some nuts in its cheeks? Another £1000. Suddenly it's £20k, and that's before the options list has even been looked at.

Enough for now. The Fiat 500X and I have got plenty of time together for judgments to be made. In the immediate future, I need to figure out whether I'm comfortable driving a car whose TV ad pitches it as the automotive equivalent of Viagra. Is it more than merely an engorged member of the 500 family?

@thebenpulman



The big surprise is how nice the interior is. Those expecting sub-Panda flaky plastics should look away now

LOGBOOK FIAT 500X 1.6 MULTIJET CROSS

> **Engine** 1598cc 16v turbodiesel 4-cyl, 118bhp @ 3750rpm, 236lb ft @ 1750rpm
> **Transmission** 6-speed manual, front-wheel drive > **Stats** 10.5sec 0-62mph, 115mph, 109g/km > **Price** £20,095 > **As tested** £24,320 > **Miles this month** 98 > **Total miles** 1598 > **Our mpg** TBC > **Official mpg** 68.9 > **Fuel this month** £12.51 > **Extra costs** £0



The plugs don't work (without sockets)

Our plug-in S-class is damn clever, but hampered by reality. Traffic and lack of sockets ruin its efficiency. By Georg Kacher

From the driving seat

➕ Great for watching telly or listening to Haydn's Amira (when stuck in traffic) ➖ Auto cruise control is too kind to stop aggressive lane-changers from plugging the smallest gaps



⬆ Screen now so wide you could view the whole of the Bayeaux Tapestry at once. Something to do in a traffic jam

MONTH 8 MERCEDES S500 PHEV

WHAT A MONTH! Stuttgart, Vienna, Stuttgart again, Salzburg. In style and comfort, yes. Stressless, no. It's holiday season, and German autobahn traffic frequently g-r-i-n-d-s to a halt.

Why? Not enough road space for too many vehicles, despite a weekend truck ban and rigorously enforced speed limits. Even when your trip kicks off at 5am, by 9am at the latest the trap will likely click shut – *Stau!* (the German word for congestion). One of these days we'll be able to lean back and let the car do the brooding. But this is 2015, and when the on-board chips take over, you will likely be out-flocked left and right at an embarrassing rate. True, the S500 does what it can to support the driver: hold the lane even through mild bends, monitor other vehicles with cameras and proximity sensors, scan the road surface ahead for irregularities and pre-condition the dampers accordingly. It's all very well, but not quite enough to make you totally feel at ease at a felt average speed of 27mph.

The last four weeks passed with almost no plug-ins. At

the airport, the six 220V nozzles were regularly taken. At the hotels in Vienna and Stuttgart, the underground car parks were blatantly devoid of charging stations. In Salzburg, the solitary socket had the wrong format. At home, Zoltan was busy painting the garage. No big deal? Well, in combination with a fair amount of motorway driving, the consumption dropped from 31.3 to 25.5mpg. Not bad for a 442bhp 5250mm 2140kg land yacht. But unexceptional for a plug-in hybrid. To get the best out of this system, you want to travel at a reasonably brisk pace and recharge the batteries via lift-off and braking. At ginger velocities, the black box prioritises e-mode, thereby sucking the lifeblood out of the fully charged energy cells in less than 20 miles. I regularly use e-charge which quickly gets the capacity back up to a level that allows us to cruise through town silently like a majestic black whale.

LOGBOOK MERCEDES-BENZ S500 PHEV

➤ **Engine** 2996cc 24v V6 turbo petrol with plug-in hybrid electric drive, 436bhp @ 5000rpm, 354lb ft @ 1600rpm ➤ **Gearbox** 7-speed auto, rear-wheel drive ➤ **Stats** 5.2sec 0-62mph, 155mph (electronically limited), 65g/km ➤ **Price** €108,945 ➤ **As tested** €154,890 ➤ **Miles this month** 1929 ➤ **Total miles** 11,019 ➤ **Our mpg** 25.5 ➤ **Official mpg** 100.9 ➤ **Fuel this month** €294.60 ➤ **Extra costs** €0

Jumpers for goalposts

MONTH 10 VOLVO V60 D6 HYBRID

REMEMBER AT school when captains would take it in turns to pick their players for the lunchtime kickabout? We have a similar nightly ritual on CAR to decide what we drive home. And if I'm not in the V60, its key hangs unloved in the box: it's not last pick, it's no pick.

Discussing its shortcomings (obstructive steering, jittery ride, no left foot) with CJ, we warmly recommended the V60 Polestar as a reference point. This is Volvo's S4 Avant rival, with a 345bhp six, all-wheel drive, uprated suspension with Ohlins dampers, and Brembo brakes. The comparison is eye-opening – and teeth-rattling when it comes to ride quality. The Polestar's suspension feels as unyielding and lashed down as

an F1 car's: the ride is brutal, whereas the hybrid's primary ride is just busy and stiff-legged. Volvo says the Polestar's steering is largely unchanged compared with the regular wagon's, but it feels so deft and engaging compared with our aggressively self-centring and glutinous rack.

The Polestar's exhaust sounds a charming thrum, and the turbocharged engine is good for 0-62mph in 5.0sec. It doesn't feel blisteringly punchy; a criticism that can be leveled at the D6, whose 325lb ft of torque almost matches the Polestar's, before being bolstered by the electric motor's grunt. Both V60s share other traits too: portly frames and unruffled civility on a cruise.

PHIL McNAMARA @CARPhilMc

LOGBOOK

VOLVO V60 D6 R-DESIGN LUX

➤ **Price** £51,675 ➤ **As tested** £53,150 (inc. £5k subsidy) ➤ **Miles this month** 228 ➤ **Total miles** 16,670 ➤ **Our mpg** 41.4 ➤ **Official mpg** 148.7 ➤ **Fuel this month** £32.73 ➤ **Extra costs** £0

Lesser-spotted
Volvos flock
together



From the driving seat

➕ 20+ miles of silent e-running on a full charge ➕ Smooth-shifting auto 'box ➖ Polestar's rack shows up D6's unruly steering ➖ Chassis lacks poise: no surprise with 300kg hybrid batteries in the boot ➕ Tyre and wind noise well controlled



The year we lived the 911 dream

Look up 'petrolhead' and it says 'one who dreams of owning a Porsche 911.' That's us, and that's what we did – in a pre-owned 997. **By Tim Pollard**

**GOODBYE
MONTH 13
PORSCHE
911 (977)**

IS THE ENGINE in the wrong place?

Would Porsche-fying our lives ruin our bank balances? Can you possibly justify spending forty large on a five-year-old, out-of-date car? Would decades of rave reviews end up unravelling under the cold

scrutiny of day-to-day life with a truculent, impractical status symbol? All these questions – and more – have been bubbling away during our year-long tenure of a secondhand 997.

We've learned from research that nine-elevens most likely figure in your dream garage: they hail from that mystical sweet spot between the exotic and the attainable, and by picking an approved used one we hoped to discover whether we could hand-on-heart recommend you follow suit.

The Porsche arrived just in time for Le Mans 2014 and contributing editor Ben Oliver drove to La Sarthe as his first assignment in the Carrera 2. Our spec was tantalisingly close to perfection: it's a second-generation 997 which ushered in the direct-injection flat-six and PDK twin-clutch auto, optioned with niceties such as zippily heated leather seats, extended nav package, Bluetooth phone connectivity and upgraded 19-inch alloys.

The car came from the Porsche Approved Pre-Owned scheme, arguably the safest way to source your organic used Pork. With it comes the security of a two-year warranty and breakdown

cover in case things go wrong, and a 111-point bill of health and servicing top-up to make sure it doesn't. Yes, you'll find cheaper at supermarkets but we'd encourage you to check franchised dealers first; their prices are on occasion closer to reputable specialists than you may think.

We made one change to FE59 SJY before delivery, swapping the crap gearchange buttons on the steering wheel for a more intuitive paddleshift. What a difference! The plus/minus buttons on early Gen 2 cars are banished forever – they're a rare Porsche *faux pas* – and the satisfying clunk of metal paddle (so much better than an F-type's) has been a highlight of 911 ownership this year. It did cost us £865, mind.

I ended up quite liking the PDK transmission. Damned with faint praise? Early doors, I regretted our sports car not having the manual but, after a year of commuting and trudging to airports or around town, I'm *almost* convinced. You have to tap the Sport button first, to sharpen the shift speed, as it's sluggish in auto mode. Truth is, the first-gen PDK isn't as slick as later iterations, but the auto does add an extra degree of flexibility to the repertoire. Driven in manual mode, it's nearly as satisfying as DIY.

With seven ratios, cruising is very relaxed indeed, the 3614cc flat-six burbling away at just 1900rpm in top. This helps fuel



Maybe one jetwash too many for our front bumper? The squashed flies are gone, but they took our paintwork with them



What a car, what a year, what an anorak! Our Tim lives the car nerd dream, wardrobe and all. But now it's over

COUNT THE COST

Cost a year ago £43,850
Dealer sale price £39,521
Private sale price £36,546
Part-exchange price £34,761
Cost per mile 41p
Cost per mile including depreciation £1.14



From the driving seat

➕ Entry 911 Carrera PDK does 0-62mph in 4.5sec
 ➕ Few rivals feel so nimble, right-sized
 ➕ Older 911s still get a handbrake!
 ➖ Wish ours had the sports exhaust
 ➖ Still don't trust the digital oil dipstick...



consumption and we were impressed by how close to the claimed average of 29.4mpg we came, routinely hitting 25mpg+. With a decent 64-litre fuel tank (three litres down on Carrera 4s, anoraks), we enjoyed a frisson of reassurance every time we filled up and saw 400 miles flash up on the predicted range.

Nothing broke or failed in our year with the 911. Faults can be summarised on the fingers of one hand: the PDK threw a wobble twice and went into neutral at low, about-town speeds, but the problem disappeared; a rear exhaust finisher came loose and ended up at a wonky angle; and the front bumper had a small area of delamination, possibly after a power hose too many. But the 911 left us after nearly 13,000 hard miles of daily driving feeling as tight as the day it arrived.

Palpable engineering integrity is one of the crowning achievements of the 911. It feels so much better built than comparable exotica of this vintage—from the solidly assembled dashboard to the way it sits on the road, dives into corners and responds to every input into those precisely weighted, delicate pedals and (still hydraulically assisted) wheel. The leather hide felt like new, the air-con



Porsche's centre screen a bit dated, but it's the only bit of the car that shows its age

LOGBOOK PORSCHE 911 (997) CARRERA

➤ **Engine** 3614cc 24v 6-cyl, 345bhp @ 6500rpm, 289lb ft @ 4400rpm ➤ **Gearbox** 7-speed twin-clutch PDK, rear-wheel drive ➤ **Stats** 4.5sec 0-62mph, 179mph, 225g/km ➤ **Price** £69,538 ➤ **As tested** £43,850 ➤ **Miles on test** 12,372 ➤ **Total miles** 38,973 ➤ **Our mpg** 24.8 ➤ **Official mpg** 28.8 ➤ **Fuel cost overall** £2760.73 ➤ **Extra costs overall** £2297 (service and repairs)

blew so cold we occasionally froze and the retro touches such as carpeted doors are beautifully finished.

Running costs were bearable, bar one pricey visit to Mid-Sussex Porsche at 32,820 miles. The scheduled service at £398 was very reasonable, but three tyres (£853), bi-annual brake fluid change (£114), six-yearly replacement filters, belts and fluids (£307), new catalytic converter heat shields (£241) and sundries sent the total spiralling to £2297. Be reassured that 911s only need maintenance every two years or 30,000 miles and those 19in N-rated Michelin Pilot Sports had 5mm at every corner when it left us.

Should you plunge your hard-earned into a similar 997-era 911? Our experience would resoundingly support you if you did. Its size remains a treat to use—narrow and wieldy enough to drive every day, the +2 seats great for kids—the drive never ceased to put a smile on our face and the best bit is solid residual values: it's lost £9k in a year, less than our new Seat Leon Cupra 280 did. Keep it for longer—or life—and you won't suffer that loss.

📍 @TimPollardCars



From the driving seat

⊕ Extra travel gives a smooth ride ⊖ Can be raucous under heavy load, or sound depressed at 2100rpm ⊕ Usual beefy VW Group diesel with plenty of in-gear shove ⊖ It's no sporty machine: increased height means more body roll

Pulman auditions for *I'm a Tall Person, Get Me Out of Here*

Take that, you Belgians

This strange niche-buster is turning out to be all the family car you need, especially when it's peeing down. By Steve Moody

MONTH 4 SEAT LEON X-PERIENCE

I KNEW there was a reason why I should always have a car equipped with four-wheel drive. It's because torrential, biblical rain follows me wherever I go. Just ask any CAR snapper lumbered on a shoot with me – anywhere in the world and I'll drag

precipitation along for the ride. So for our holiday this year, the Moody family decided to escape to the south of France because it hardly ever rains there.

It rained solidly for three days. Fortunately, the Leon's trusty 4wd system ensured grip and traction on country roads that hadn't seen water in months, and ended up pretty slippery as a result. And as I sailed past endless fields of sunflowers, sending vast plumes of spray into them like a speedboat on the Med, another thought occurred: this Leon has all the space of a Qashqai or similar, but handles better, is more economical, and less in your face.

Despite easily swallowing the vast amount of stuff needed for such a trip into its cavernous interior I had initially thought the 150bhp Leon might struggle. Not a bit of it. It has lots of grunt and happily cruised the autoroutes, doing nearly 50mpg. Even when being tailgated by holidaying Belgians in Audis (quite simply the

planet's worst combination for motoring standards), I still had enough poke without dropping a gear to create another metre of space for a half a km before they locked on to our bumper again.

Not everything is perfect though. In sixth at 2100rpm, around about 70mph, a drone emanates from under the bonnet, sounding like a really depressed whale has got its fin trapped in the air filter. Fortunately in France the cruise is at 80mph, so Willy is set free, but in the UK he's ever present, and mightily nauseous. And the sat-nav is so dim-witted and archaic it makes Fred Flintstone look like Bill Gates.

Also, the cabin plastics are at the lower end of the VW Group quality spectrum, and by the end of the trip my elbows hurt. So rain, annoying Belgians and sore extremities. A typical holiday.

Ⓜ @Sjmoody37

LOGBOOK SEAT LEON X-PERIENCE

➤ **Engine** 1968cc 16v, 147bhp @ 3500-4000rpm, 250lb ft @ 1750rpm ➤ **Gearbox** 6-speed manual, all-wheel drive ➤ **Stats** 8.7sec 0-62mph, 129mph, 129g/km ➤ **Price** £26,370 ➤ **As tested** £28,285 ➤ **Miles this month** 2,142 ➤ **Total miles** 4,952 ➤ **Our MPG** 49.3 ➤ **Official MPG** 57.6 ➤ **Fuel this month** £205.65 ➤ **Extra costs** £0



Archeologists are still trying to date the sat-nav. Neolithic period?

Lexus hasn't lost its touch

MONTH 3 LEXUS NX300h

NICE TOUCHES – every Lexus has them. You can be unsure about the obsession with hybrids (and I am), you can question the looks (you shouldn't – it looks great), you can pooh-pooh the packaging (yep, the boot's not huge). But the touches will win you round like a cheeky charmer who you just can't stay mad at.

I've just recharged my mobile wirelessly by placing it on a tray in the armrest. When I approach the car at night the door handles light up (and the key barrel is invisible!). The ambient lighting around the instrument cluster changes colour when you change driving modes. The drinks holder has a friction base which allows you to unscrew a bottle top one-handed. The panoramic view monitor gives a helicopter view of the

car on the centre screen (using cameras on the door mirrors, front grille and rear bumper). The 'remote touchpad' may be only usable by those who were great at the boardgame Operation, but it has a beautiful leather palm rest. The Mark Levinson hi-fi is bespoke to the NX, digitally tailoring the sound to the cabin's shape.

The touches dial out the irritations like noise-cancelling headphones, although they've got their work cut out to nullify the drivetrain. More on that to come. One nice surprise though: I drove it at Rockingham as a tracking car, expecting it to dissolve into dynamic mush, and was amazed by its body control, tautness, grip and defiance of understeer. Our James, following in a GT86, said he couldn't believe how flat it cornered, how little it rolled. Impressive.

GREG FOUNTAIN Ⓜ @GregFountain1

LOGBOOK LEXUS NX300h

➤ **Price** £42,995 ➤ **As tested** £44,640 ➤ **Miles this month** 1177 ➤ **Total miles** 4958 ➤ **Our mpg** 38.1 ➤ **Official mpg** 54.3 ➤ **Fuel this month** £241.32 ➤ **Extra costs** £0

From the driving seat

⊕ Cabin so nicely made you can forgive it anything ⊖ Shouty, whiny drivetrain less charming than Katie Hopkins ⊕ Chassis superbly composed for an SUV



Home truths for new Mondeo man

MONTH 6
FORD
MONDEO

Once the polish has worn off and the looks are second nature, what's she like to live with? Here are a few things we've noticed. By Chris Chilton



↑ Load management? Posh name for boot rail

The boot isn't the biggest in the class but it's still deep enough to let you lose a couple of shopping bags into its abyss. The optional £250 Load Management System

comprising a floor-mounted sliding rail and cargo net sorts that, and is fully removable when you need use of every single square litre.



↑ Sat-nav screen illegible in sunlight

We've hated on the touchscreen nav before – it's horribly laggy and the buttons are minute. But here's one more whinge: it's almost

impossible to see in sunlight. On the plus side the 12-speaker Sony sound system does a great job of filling the vast cabin with music.

From the driving seat

↑ Impressively hushed cruiser ↑ Massive cabin space, but boot space only fair
 ↓ Disappointingly American interior trim
 ↓ Strong mid-range punch but not great on fuel ↓ It's a big car with a big turning circle. Optional parking sensors a must



↑ Useful stuff for those who drive while asleep

Safety aids feature big in the Mondeo package. We've tried the Lane Keeping Aid (standard on Titanium trim; we normally leave

it switched off) but fortunately not the Active City Stop auto-braking function (£200) or seen the £175 inflatable rear seatbelts in action.



↑ Who let that sunshine in here?

The £900 sunroof floods the cabin with light, but there's not much chance of any other kind of flood happening because the opening function is kaput.

The whole lot was covered up in July when I hired another roofbox from Iain at the ever-helpful A2outdoorhire.co.uk for a camping trip.

LOGBOOK FORD MONDEO TITANIUM 2.0TDCi

➤ **Engine** 1997cc 16v turbodiesel 4-cyl, 178bhp @ 3500rpm, 295lb ft @ 2000rpm ➤ **Gearbox** 6-speed dual-clutch auto, all-wheel drive
 ➤ **Stats** 8.7sec 0-62mph, 135mph, 130g/km ➤ **Price** £26,865 ➤ **As tested** £31,135 ➤ **Miles this month** 2270 ➤ **Total miles** 8459 ➤ **Our mpg** 38.9 ➤ **Official mpg** 56.5 ➤ **Fuel this month** £318.62 ➤ **Extra costs (this month)** £0



RICHARD PARSON

COUNT THE COST

Cost new £21,250 (including £5395 of options)
Franchised dealer: £17,057
Private sale: £15,972
Part exchange: £14,952
Cost per mile 13.0p
Cost per mile including depreciation £1.15



Extremely tall **CAR** correspondent gazes upon extremely narrow rear door

Big love for the bigger small car

So, we stuck our tallest bloke in a Mini. Unfair? Come on, we gave him two extra doors! And it paid off. **By Ben Pulman**

GOODBYE MONTH 10 MINI 5DR

I'VE RUN ALL sorts of long-term test cars over the past eight years, from a Clio Cup that lived for summer track days but desperately needed air-con, to a gorgeous Aston DB9 with a thirsty V12 and a temperamental fuel filler cap.

There have been a myriad of others, but I truly miss only two: the M3 (an E92 Coupe, with the Competition Pack) and the Porsche Panamera (a pre-facelift GTS). Yes, I know it looks like I've been suckered by cars that have big naturally aspirated V8s in their noses, but I do have a legitimate point to make. To that pairing I'd now add a third car I'll miss: the Mini.

You might scoff. You probably have. But let me explain: it's about fitness for purpose, and all things considered, for the past ten months I don't think another car could have dovetailed any better with my life. A move from Milton Keynes to London in late 2014, and a new commute that involved only the train and the Tube (or the bus when the unions strike), meant the number of miles I spent commuting in a car each year plummeted from around 35,000 to zero. Suddenly I needed wheels for leisure purposes and little else.

Enter the Mini, in a fetching shade of blue. From day one it made a potentially tedious task simple, as the short overhangs, thin A-, B- and C-pillars, upright windscreen and tight turning circle ensured it was a cinch to park. If you live in the Capital, you'll know how important that is. Exploring southwest London looking for a new basketball team was equally straight-

forward thanks to the frankly brilliant sat-nav and iDrive system (but let's be honest, you'd expect nothing less from a £1175 option).

Beyond that, it did all the things expected of a BMW-era Mini, like seducing your senses with changeable interior mood lighting, the red glow around the Engine Start toggle switch, and all the little intangibles that lift the ambience over and above rivals. It was damn good to drive too: there are sports cars that don't seat you this low to the floor; or dart into corners so positively; plus I loved the weighty steering, the slightly knuckly gearchange and the firm pressures required on all three pedals. The little turbo'd three-cylinder engine loosened up nicely too, and I never once found myself wanting four.

The only real downsides can be counted with your thumbs. For one, I always had the nagging suspicion that even this five-door Mini, with an extra 72mm between the wheels over and above the regular three-door hatch, just wasn't quite big enough. My frame may be partly at fault, as no one could physically sit behind me, but then more often than not, the other half and I also filled the boot and ended up packing onto the backseat whenever we went away.

Fault number two? The stiff ride. My Mini wasn't specced with the optional run-flat tyres, but it sure as heck felt like it, and more than once I double-checked for markings on the sidewalls.

Despite that, had an Italian replacement not just arrived I'd be browsing PCH and PCP options right about now. Which I hope tells you everything you need to know about how much I loved this Mini.

@thebenpulman



Still small in here, despite extra length, but also still beautifully built. How long before centre screen gets bigger than steering wheel?

LOGBOOK MINI COOPER 5DR 1.5

> **Engine** 1499cc 12v turbocharged 3-cyl, 134bhp @ 4500-6000rpm, 162lb ft @ 2500-4000rpm > **Transmission** 6-speed manual, front-wheel drive > **Stats** 8.2sec 0-62mph, 129mph, 109g/km > **Price** £15,855 > **As tested** £21,250 > **Miles this month** 2160 > **Total miles** 7066 > **Our mpg (overall)** 40.6 > **Official mpg** 60.1 > **Fuel cost overall** £807.08 > **Extra costs overall** £0



Range Rover Sport

MONTH 8 By Ben Oliver

I WAS impressed with the Dynamic Response system when I first drove a prototype Range Rover Sport two years ago, and after eight months with this car I find myself clicking the rotary controller one stop to engage it every time the road gets twisty. It sharpens the handling and powertrain response noticeably, but the anti-roll function is its real advantage, reducing seasickness for all occupants. Only the entry-level HSE spec misses out on Dynamic: make sure you don't.

@thebenoliver

LOGBOOK RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 SDV6 HSE DYNAMIC

> Price £66,250 > As tested £75,607 > Miles this month 1509 > Total miles 10,365 > Our mpg 25.4 > Official mpg 37.7 > Fuel this month £315.57 > Extra costs £0



Audi TTS

MONTH 2 By Tim Pollard

WELL, THIS is a turn up for the books. Of all the things I could be writing about our new TTS – its design, the Porsche-troubling pace – I'm talking about floor mats. But that's the beauty of a long-term test; it gives us the chance to meander around the more unlikely day-to-day practicalities of living with a car.

And it's the TT's removable carpets that've caught my eye this month: they're hard-wearing, easy to clean and somehow classy at the same time, with a nylon weave creating a rubberised feel for a grippy, durable finish. Neat.

@TimPollardCars

LOGBOOK AUDI TTS COUPE

> Price £40,270 > As tested £46,565 > Miles this month 880 > Total miles 1852 > Our mpg 26.3 > Official mpg 40.9 > Fuel this month £173.61 > Extra costs £0



VW Golf R

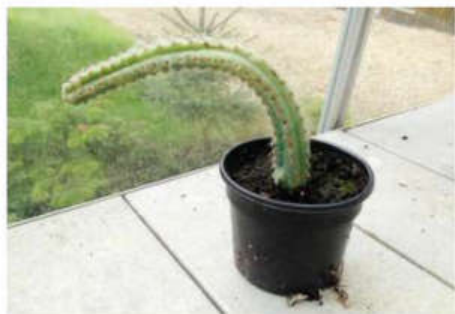
MONTH 4 By Ben Barry

REGULAR READERS will know the Golf R was stolen last month following a house break-in. Twitter found the car, but the keys were never recovered, so we had to get locks, keys and ignition barrel changed; no easy process. Damage? A deep scratch on the boot – possibly caused when it was hoisted onto the recovery truck? – and a kerbed alloy, both of which have now been fixed. Still no arrests, but I'm very glad to have the Golf back; I'd nick it if I had no scruples too.

@iamBenBarry

LOGBOOK VOLKSWAGEN GOLF R

> Price £31,475 > As tested £35,640 > Miles this month 1003 > Total miles 3763 > Our mpg 30.0 > Official mpg 39.8 > Fuel this month £177.16 > Extra costs £0



Citroën C4 Cactus

MONTH 7 By Anthony French-Constant

THIS JUST in from the missus: *Back now. Good thing to have done. My arse hurts from the*

Said freshly texted titbit renders two insightful snippets of information; firstly, the Cactus has now achieved such global renown that it merits its own emoticon and, secondly, it's still an absurdly uncomfortable conveyance during a journey of any length whatsoever. We'd celebrate average fuel consumption edging 55mpg far more vociferously were but one of those miles to prove even vaguely comfortable.

LOGBOOK CITROËN C4 CACTUS

> Price £17,990 > As tested £19,330 > Miles this month 1081 > Total miles 6075 > Our mpg 54.2 > Official mpg 83.1 > Fuel this month £101.04 > Extra costs £0



Renault Twingo

MONTH 5 By Mark Walton

THE TWINGO is turning out to be one of the most conspicuous cars I've ever driven. It was parked on the street near my home for a week while I was on holiday, and several members of the CAR team noticed it, looking neglected like an unwanted yellow puppy. They thought I'd died, or lost my keys or something. Funny – it's just a city car, not a Lamborghini, but it definitely has a noticeable character, as well as colour. If you're planning to do anything clandestine, choose a grey one.

@markwalton_

LOGBOOK RENAULT TWINGO PLAY SCE 70

> Price £9995 > As tested £10,585 > Miles this month 969 > Total miles 3798 > Our mpg 37.8 > Official mpg 62.8 > Fuel this month £80.34 > Extra costs £0



Ginetta G40 GRDC

MONTH 5 By James Taylor

A CONSEQUENCE of driving a car as low and generally dinky as the G40 is that other traffic looks positively massive. Everything seems a size or two up from reality; a Corsa looks like a Mokka, a 5-series a 7-series, a Range Rover a block of flats.

Far from feeling too low, you wonder what everyone else is doing up there so high. It's easy to read the road from down here, but also to feel more in touch with it. Sitting lower definitely heightens your senses.

@JamesTaylor_5

LOGBOOK GINETTA G40 GRDC

> Price £39,960 > As tested £35,940 > Miles this month 119 > Total miles 3697 > Our mpg 27.5 > Official mpg n/a > Fuel this month £52.15 > Extra costs £0

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DMS CLS63 AMG (EVO AUGUST '14) "ENGINE UPGRADE ADDS HUGE PERFORMANCE AND REAL CHARACTER"

DMS 1M (EVO MARCH 12) "THERE'S A REAL RIP TO THE WAY THE REVS PILE ON ABOVE 4000RPM"

DMS SL65 BLACK SERIES (EVO OCTOBER '10) "IT FEELS LIKE THE LOVE CHILD OF AN SL65 AND A PORSCHE GT2"

DMS 135i (BMW CAR MAY '09) "THE STANDARD CAR IS GREAT BUT DMS HAVE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL"

DMS 997 TURBO 3.6 (EVO SEPTEMBER '08) "IT'S EPIC, HILARIOUS AND ADDICTIVE IN EVERY GEAR, YET DOCILE WHEN CRUISING"

DMS 997 TURBO 3.8 PDK (EVO JUNE '11) "DELIVERY IS ALMOST UNCOMFORTABLY FORCEFUL"



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AUDI

AUDI RS6 4.0 T V8 » 690+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
AUDI RS6 V10 » 680+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
AUDI R8 V10 » 592+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
AUDI RS4 B7/ R8 » 445 BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
AUDI RS3/RSQ3 » 420+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
AUDI S3 / GOLF R » 373+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
AUDI 3.0TDi (ALL MODELS) » 315+ BHP
AUDI 3.0 Bi-TDi (ALL MODELS) » 380+ BHP
AUDI Q7/A8 4.2 TDi » 400+ BHP

BMW

M5 V10 » 548+ BHP (205 MPH)
X5M / X6M » 618+ BHP
1M » 411+ BHP
M3 E90/92 » 445 BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
M135i/ M235i » 402 BHP
M4/M3 3.0T » 520+ BHP
M5 F10/M6 (STAGE 1) » 680 BHP
M5 F10/M6 (STAGE 2) » 730 BHP
F10 520D » 240 BHP
F10 530D » 305 BHP
335i/135i/X6 » 370+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
123D » 252 BHP

316D/216D/116D » 160 BHP
318D/218D/118D » 225 BHP
330D E90 » 296+ BHP
320D E90 » 215 BHP
420i/320i/220i/120i » 275+ BHP
435i/ F30 335i » 390 BHP
428i/328i » 295 BHP
535D / 335D / X5 SD » 355+ BHP
640D/335D/535D/435D » 390 BHP
730D » 305+ BHP
X5 4.0D / 740D » 370 BHP
X5 3.0D » 305 BHP
X6 X5.0i 4.4 » 500+BHP
X6 M50D/X5M50D/550D » 450 BHP

MERCEDES-BENZ

A200CDi/C200CDi/E200CDi » 175 BHP
A250/C250 » 260 BHP
A45/CLA45 » 420 BHP
C300 HYBRID » 285 BHP
A220CDi/C220CDi/E220CDi » 215 BHP
C350/CLS350/E350/S350 » 315 BHP
E400 /C450 » 420+ BHP
C400 » 400 BHP
'63' 5.5 Bi-TURBO ALL MODELS » 690+BHP
'500' 4.7 Bi-TURBO ALL MODELS » 498+BHP
S65 (W222) » 780 BHP
SL65 BLACK » 720+ BHP (+DELIMIT)
SL65 AMG » 690 BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
'55' AMG KOMPRESSOR » 580+BHP
C63 AMG 6.3 » 530+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)

C63 AMG 4.0T » CALL FOR DETAILS
SL63 AMG 6.3 » 560+BHP (+DE-LIMIT, RE-MAP & LOWER ABC SUSPENSION)
CL600 Bi-TURBO » 580+ BHP
SLK55 AMG » 420+ BHP (+DELIMIT)
320 CDI V6 » 274 BHP
350 CDI V6 » 312 BHP
420 /450 CDI V8 » 358 BHP

ALL 2015 RANGE ROVERS AVAILABLE

R ROVER SC 5.0 » 580+ BHP
R ROVER 4.4 SDV8 » 395+ BHP
R ROVER 3.0 TDV6 » 315+ BHP
R ROVER 3.0 SDV6 » 345+ BHP
EVOQUE/DISCO SPORT 2.2 DIESEL » 240+ BHP

PORSCHE

997 TURBO/S 3.8 INC PDK » 611 BHP
997 TURBO 3.6 » 625+ BHP
997 GT2 RS » 670+ BHP
996 TURBO/GT2 » 600+ BHP
997 CARRERA S PDK » 400+ BHP
997 CARRERA S » 376+ BHP
997 CARRERA PDK » 368 BHP
997 CARRERA GTS » 435 BHP
997 GT3 UP » 436 BHP
BOXSTER 3.4S » 336+ BHP
CAYMAN S » 342 BHP
MACAN 3.0D » 315 BHP
CAYENNE GTS » 440 BHP

CAYENNE TURBO 4.8 » 578+ BHP
CAYENNE TURBO S 4.8 » 600+ BHP
CAYENNE 4.2 DIESEL » 450+ BHP
CAYENNE DIESEL » 315+ BHP
PANAMERA TURBO » 600+ BHP
PANAMERA DIESEL » 315+ BHP

EXOTIC / MISC

FERRARI CALIFORNIA » 487 BHP
FERRARI 599 » 647 BHP
FERRARI 430 » 525 BHP
GALLARDO » 546 BHP
LP560 » 608+BHP
LP640 » 707 BHP
HURACAN » 640+ BHP
AVENTADOR » CALL FOR DETAILS
MCLAREN MP4-12C » 700 BHP
MCLAREN 650S » 720 BHP
MURCIELAGO LP640 » 707 BHP
MASERATI Ghibli 3.0S PETROL » 470 BHP
MASERATI Ghibli 3.0 DIESEL » 312 BHP
MASERATI GT/SPORT » 438 BHP
MASERATI GT S / MC » 479+ BHP
BENTLEY 4.0 T V8 » 690 BHP
BENTLEY CGT / F-SPUR (INC 2013) » 680+ BHP
BENTLEY GT SPEED (INC 2013 ON) » 695 BHP
BENTLEY SUPERSPORT » 720+ BHP

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The Good, the Bad & the Ugly

ABARTH

500 ★★★★★

> Pricey pocket rockets, all powered by 1.4-litre turbos in various stages of steroidal over-compensation. Divine details, dodgy dynamics
> **VERDICT:** A Vegas wedding: hilarious at first, trickier to endure longer term

ALFA ROMEO

MITO ★★★★★

> Decent engines but generally rubbish to drive, Alfa's soggy-handling, hard-riding premium mini is crucified by the real thing and Audi's A1
> **VERDICT:** At least it's got its looks. No, wait. It's an ugly Alfa. It's got nothing

GIULIETTA ★★★★★

> Looked like a credible Golf rival for a while but now the game has moved on. Keen prices, but rivals are roomier, classier and more fun to drive
> **VERDICT:** Miles better than a Mito. Miles better than a 4C, even. Miles behind a Mk7 Golf

4C/4C SPIDER ★★★★★

> Sexy carbon two-seater over-promises and under-delivers on a double-your-dong-length web-scam scale. Spider a step in right direction
> **VERDICT:** Shoots for the moon, hits itself in the foot. Elise more fun, Cayman a better bet

ALPINA

D3/B3 ★★★★★

> Twin-turbo petrol and diesel stonk and smooth auto 'boxes mated to a quality chassis, but watch for some questionable OAP-spec interior finishes
> **VERDICT:** Try an xDrive D3 Touring – it's what the M3 wants to be when it grows up

D4/B4 ★★★★★

> Same blend of fast and frugal as above but slotted into sleeker 4-series shell. ZF auto not as snappy as M4's twin clutch, but much smoother
> **VERDICT:** 53mpg and 62mph in 4.6sec? And you're alright with this, BMW?

D5/B5 ★★★★★

> Twin-turbo B5 petrol V8's 590lb ft could de-forest the Amazon while planet-loving D5 doesn't let meagre 155g/km prevent 174mph max
> **VERDICT:** M5 alternative with Touring body option you can't have with the real thing

B7 ★★★★★

> BMW doesn't make an M7, but Alpina does. Twin-blown petrol V8 delivers 'bahn-busting performance that's best enjoyed in Germany
> **VERDICT:** Niche S63 alternative hamstrung by ugliness of the raw materials

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NEW IN THIS MONTH

Jaguar XF

'Second-gen XF now 75% aluminium. Looks like an over-inflated XE: bigger inside, smaller outside, still a great steer'



p144



p143

BMW X1

'Miles better to look at and drive. It's a proper SUV now. It's even based on the fwd Mini platform. Swallow that bile'

Aston Vantage GT12

'Crazy cars, crazy prices – they want £250k for wild GT12, yet it instantly sold out'



p141

XD3 ★★★★★

> X3 35d-based high-rise hot-rod delivers 350bhp, 516lb ft, and the horizon through your windscreen. Spoiled by a rock-hard ride
> **VERDICT:** Another niche BMW Munich leaves to Alpina, maybe 'cos Porsche Macan is better

ARIEL

ATOM ★★★★★

> Only the Pope's lips get more up close and personal with the tarmac than an Atom driver, but there's zero protection when the heavens

open
> **VERDICT:** Spectacular toy. Great on track, barmy on road. Chassis doubles as a clothes airer, which is just as well...

NOMAD ★★★★★

> Not content with terrifying on tarmac, Ariel now offers the off-road Nomad. Gains a roll-over structure but still no doors...
> **VERDICT:** Don't forget to put the hot water on – you'll be needing a bath when you get home

ASTON MARTIN

VANTAGE ★★★★★

> Ageing entry level Aston has ace steering, but make sure you go manual: plodding semi-auto is as dynamic as a Ron Dennis interview
> **VERDICT:** Longer in the tooth than Brucie, but constant updating means it's still desirable

VANTAGE V12/GT12 ★★★★★

> Cramming huge V12 into Vantage's V8-sized engine bay makes for a track weapon that thinks it's a hot rod. Superb chassis, but another duff

'box
> **VERDICT:** Crazy cars, crazy prices – they want £250k for wild GT12, yet it instantly sold out

DB9 ★★★★★

REPLACED SOON
> Recently re-skinned, and now with 8-sp ZF auto. Our long term had 'bespoke concerns' (the trustworthiness of a crack-addicted bank cashier)
> **VERDICT:** A beautiful GT, but same money buys more exciting V12 Vantage

VANQUISH ★★★★★

> Looking like the old DBS after 10 sessions of lipo, Vanquish's exquisite detailing hides modern carbon structure, but performance is a decade out
> **VERDICT:** Heart says buy, until a Ferrari F12 says bye-bye

RAPIDE ★★★★★

> Take that, Panamera! Aston shows Porsche how to make a supercar/saloon cocktail. Forget limo pretensions though, it's a four-door 2+2
> **VERDICT:** Pretty, but interior more dated than a New York socialite and as hard on your wallet

AUDI

A1 HATCH/SPORTBACK ★★★★★

> Posh Polo does it all, from 1.0 miser to S1 micro rocket. Not cheap, even before you've splurged on options. £30k is a mouse click away
> **VERDICT:** Classy Mini rival that doesn't turn into Quasimodo when you tick the 5dr option

A3 HATCH/S/BACK/SALOON ★★★★★

> Your passengers will be in awe of the refinement and finish, unless they're nursing knees bashed in the back of the shorter three-door shell
> **VERDICT:** Brilliant hatch and not much financial gulf to a Golf. Try sporty S-Line on supple SE chassis

A3 CABRIOLET ★★★★★

> Premium sun-grabber without macho sports-car posturing. A bit tight in the back, but pretty tight in the bends too. Try a 1.8 TFSi with Sport trim
> **VERDICT:** Asexual drop-top for sensible shoes types. Worth the £2k premium over Golf

S3 / RS3 ★★★★★

> Further proof that the Germans are still power junkies at heart. 296bhp S3 is trouble enough, while new 362bhp RS3 will do 174mph. Achtung, baby.
> **VERDICT:** Far better than they used to be, but not as exciting as they should be. Buy a Golf R

A4 SALOON/AVANT/ALLROAD ★★★★★

REPLACED SOON
> Creaky A4 still looks the part but us and it will be put out of our misery later this year when new one arrives. Duff ride, dated dash, decent engines
> **VERDICT:** Never class leading when new, and that was in 2008! C-class is better

RS4 ★★★★★

> Brutal RS treatment makes a monster of hum A4. No 4dr, no manual and no turbos, this wicked wagon's V8 redlines higher than Ferrari's 488GTB
> **VERDICT:** Pace and space, but rides like the tyres have a tic. No match for new C63

A5 SPORTBACK ★★★★★

> In a class of one until BMW finally got its act, and the 4-series Gran Coupe, together. Pretty and practical, but like its drivers, feeling its age > **VERDICT:** Fatherhood doesn't seem so bad with family cars this handsome. Then you drive it

A5 COUPE/CABRIO ★★★★★

> Like a 4ft 8in Miss World, stunning A5 has the looks but not the legs. Yours will suffer too thanks to offset pedals and zero rear legroom > **VERDICT:** Buying now? BMW 4-series. Feeling patient? Wait for 2016's stunning C-class coupe

RS5 ★★★★★

> Has iconic Quattro arches, but feels like it was engineered down the Arches at Phil Mitchell's *EastEnders* den of bodgery. Cramped too > **VERDICT:** Great V8 can't save misfiring flat-footed coupe. Buy a BMW M4, or the better RS4

A6 SALOON/AVANT/ALLROAD ★★★★★

> Demure big Audi an unsung hero, refined and cheap to run. Allroad an SUV for agrophobics; twin-blown 309bhp BITDi a proper mischief maker > **VERDICT:** Base models short on wow, but a solid alternative to better-handling Jag XF

RS6 ★★★★★

> For wealthy minimalists who think the S6's 444bhp isn't enough, RS6 delivers 25% more and gives the new R8 V10 a hard time at the lights > **VERDICT:** Beautifully finished all-weather family wagon that scares supercars silly

A7 SPORTBACK ★★★★★

> Slant-roof A6 takes styling cues from pretty '60s 100 coupe but can't out-cool Merc's CLS. More grippy than a sloth whose been sloppy with the superglue > **VERDICT:** Stylish GT with sensible engines, but a sports saloon? My RS, maybe

RS7 ★★★★★

> Pricier, less practical RS6 with fastback rear, same guts but gets clever rear diff as standard for oversteer here, there and everywhere given room > **VERDICT:** An Aston Rapide for the Agrophobic, but we'd have the naughtier RS6

A8 SALOON ★★★★★

> Audi's elder statesman for elder statesmen has more tech than CES at Vegas but who wants people to think they're being chauffeured in an A4? > **VERDICT:** Gadgets galore, but Merc's incredible S-class nails the luxury basics better

Q3 ★★★★★

> Dumpty dinky faux field forager is a yummy mummy fave. Forget 4wd and the diesels and go for light, zippy, 1.4 TFSI > **VERDICT:** So much better to drive than it looks. Which it'd have to be, right? Unless it was an Alfa

RSQ3 ★★★★★

> Audi's first tall-boy RS model. Hearing of the £45k price or unleashing that 335bhp five-pot both elicit same incredulous gasp > **VERDICT:** Who needs this stuff? Short people in a rush? What we do know is it's better than a GLA45 AMG

Q5 ★★★★★

> Car-like SUV offers everything from meek 180bhp front driver to a ballistic SQ5 bi-turbo diesel delivering RS performance without the fuel bills > **VERDICT:** Still one of Audi's best. Beats a top-spec A4, if not a bottom-spec Macan

Q7 ★★★★★

> Formerly massive 7-seat SUV with Titanic-like wildness morphs into massive 7-seat jacked-up estate car in new Mk2 guise > **VERDICT:** Lighter and less thirsty than before, but still less charming than Jean-Claude Juncker

TT COUPE/ROADSTER ★★★★★

> Brilliant coupe gets virtual dash, and sharper handling. Try 2.0-FSI. Boot big, but rear seats for handbags only (some men have them, you know) > **VERDICT:** A proper real-world sports car – but same money buys an early R8!

R8 V10/V10 PLUS ★★★★★

> Friday afternoon restyle meets Monday morning mechanics. New R8 offers no V8 for now, but V10 is back with 533bhp or Lamborghini 602bhp > **VERDICT:** A Lamborghini Huracan for £50k less. Friendly but ballistic; playful chassis a joy

BAC

MONO ★★★★★

> Single-seat racer that took a wrong turn out of the pits features pushrod suspension, Cosworth-tuned 2.3 Duratec and bath-like driving position > **VERDICT:** Sublime track-tool with a six-figure price that'd net you a Cayman GT4 and an Atom

BENTLEY

CONTINENTAL GT COUPE/CABRIO ★★★★★

> The repmobile of millionaires. Reliable, well-built and yes, full of VW bits. Death Star smooth W12 now sounds more rebellious, while twin-turbo GT V8 S is joyful > **VERDICT:** More of a sports car than its hefty GT image suggests

CONTINENTAL GT3-R ★★★★★

> Bonkers road racer with Max Power styling, no rear seats and shouty exhaust. Surprisingly nimble using 4wd and torque vectoring, and epically fast thanks to tricked up 580 V8 > **VERDICT:** Uncouth drag racer for rich Russians

FLYING SPUR ★★★★★

> New Spur is sharper to drive, sharper to look at, softer to sit in, and feels less like a stretched Conti. Fridge and iPads essential options for pampered rear-seat recliners > **VERDICT:** Think of it as a bargain Roller rather than a pricey A8

MULSANNNE ★★★★★

> Huge, handbuilt anachronism, with twin-turbo V8 born in the '50s, buffed to perfection, and a field of cows sacrificed for your arse's pleasure > **VERDICT:** Buy the Speed – any less outrageous display of consumption is just poor form

BMW

1-SERIES ★★★★★

> Only rear-driver in its class. Good for handling, not for cabin space. Just facelifted so now 3% less grotesque. 118i petrol a brilliant all-rounder > **VERDICT:** Want a roomy, well-appointed hatch that's great to drive and look at? Buy an A3

M135i ★★★★★

> Last of the downsizing deniers, BMW's hot hatch stays with six-pot power when all rivals offer four. Undercuts mechanically identical M235i by £4.5k > **VERDICT:** Storming drivetrain, but VW's incredible Golf R just pips it

2-SERIES COUPE/CABRIO ★★★★★

> Boot-faced booted 1-series is a Mustang with a couple of A-levels. 218d is 8.9 to 62mph and 63mpg; 4cyl 228i a cut-price, cut-down M235i > **VERDICT:** Plainier than a margarine sarnie, but TT and RCZ can't touch its space/pace combo

M235i ★★★★★

> Shoestring M3 quicker than a Cayman and almost as costly if you're profligate with options. 322bhp std; 380bhp just a Superchip away > **VERDICT:** Satisfyingly simple and a blast to drive. Coupe shell + manual 'box = purest thrills

2-SERIES ACTIVE TOURER ★★★★★

> BMW in front-drive MPV shock. Decent drive, great interior. Need to cart OAP relatives around? You'll need the 7-seat Gran Tourer. Boom boom! > **VERDICT:** The ultimate driving (to the park/crèche/post office) machine

I3 ★★★★★

> One of BMW's best cars is home to its finest cabin. Electric version has short range; hybrid is noisy and has a fuel tank like a flea's hip flask > **VERDICT:** Carbon chassis supermini, electric power and £30k price. Did we wake up in 2045?

3-SERIES SALOON/TOURING ★★★★★

> Celebrating four decades of overpriced, undersized family cars. New modular engines make it better than ever. 320d (now sub-100g/km) still top choice > **VERDICT:** Jag XE is treading heavily on its twinkling toes

3-SERIES GT ★★★★★

> High-rise Touring alternative almost as vast as a 5-series thanks to wheelbase stretch, but way more hideous. Another BMW design disaster > **VERDICT:** A £35k Mondeo with a BMW badge. Why bother when the same-price X3 is so good?

Number crunching

POWERED BY JATO

6 CARS WITH THE GREATEST ELECTRIC VEHICLE RANGE

Embrace the future without the range anxiety – these are the electric cars leading the charge

Tesla Model S 85D

330 miles

Fastest, most powerful – and most expensive – Tesla remains the EV tech leader. An extra £2.5k gets you a 90kWh battery and 6% more range
POWER 371BHP TORQUE 324LB FT
BATTERY PACK 85KWH O-62MPH 4.2SEC
TOP SPEED 155MPH PRICE £58,200



Renault Zoe

149 miles

New motor boosts Zoe range to nearly 150 miles – and it's the cheapest here. But you do have to rent the battery separately
POWER 87BHP TORQUE 162LB FT
BATTERY PACK 22KWH O-62MPH 13.5SEC
TOP SPEED 84MPH PRICE £13,445

Kia Soul EV

132 miles

Despite the big, boxy shape, adding electric power to the Soul slashes boot capacity from 354 litres to 281 litres. Ouch.
POWER 108BHP TORQUE 210LB FT
BATTERY PACK 27KWH O-62MPH 11.2SEC
TOP SPEED 90MPH PRICE £24,995



Mercedes B-class Electric Drive

124 miles

Electric B-class is also fastest B-class 0-62mph, thanks to single-speed gearbox and socking great 251lb ft of torque
POWER 178BHP TORQUE 187LB FT
BATTERY PACK 28KWH O-62MPH 7.9SEC
TOP SPEED 99.5MPH PRICE £26,950



Nissan Leaf

124 miles

Electric pioneer matches B-class range despite smaller battery pack. That's the benefit of being purpose built for electric
POWER 108BHP TORQUE 251LB FT
BATTERY PACK 24KWH O-62MPH 11.5SEC
TOP SPEED 87MPH PRICE £21,490



Volkswagen e-Golf

118 miles

Still not sure about electric vehicles? Perhaps the reassuring substance of VW's electric e-Golf can change your mind
POWER 113BHP TORQUE 199LB FT
BATTERY PACK 24KWH O-62MPH 10.4SEC
TOP SPEED 87MPH PRICE £26,325

JATO JATO Dynamics is the world's leading provider of automotive intelligence. To learn more check out www.jato.com

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

4-SERIES COUPE/CABRIO ★★★★★

> 3-series in a shell suit subtly better to drive, but same great engine choices and almost as practical. Shame about the carryover cabin > **VERDICT:** Crushes Audi's ancient A5. Folding hardtop cabrio weighty but worth it

4-SERIES GRAN COUPE ★★★★★

> Pretty and practical, like a bikini car wash, hatchback GC costs £3k more than 3-series but has std leather. Five belts but only four seats > **VERDICT:** Smart and useful, much more than a niche exercise. But why isn't this the 3-series?

M3/M4 ★★★★★

> M3 means saloon only; coupe is M4. Both ditch V8 for 425bhp twin-turbo six with choice of manual or DCT auto. Still no xDrive 4x4 > **VERDICT:** Dynamite drift machines' mega mid-range comes at the expense of old V8's joie de vivre

5-SERIES SALOON/TOURING ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS > Hard to fault the default exec. Go for 520d or 530d M Sport, 2F auto, adaptive dampers. Ace adaptive headlamps a £545 option > **VERDICT:** Stylish as Teflon trousers but that drip-dry gusset is just so handy. Best exec bar none

5-SERIES GT ★★★★★

> BMW GB: 'The contours... make its attraction instant. Stylish presence of a saloon combines harmoniously with the sporty elegance of a coupe' > **VERDICT:** Munich's Vel Satis. Hated by critics, loved by owners. All three of them

M5 ★★★★★

> While our enthusiasm for the twin-turbo V8 is tempered slightly by the artificial engine noise, it's sublime to drive and gets better with every iteration > **VERDICT:** Still the fast saloon daddy. 592bhp '30 Jahre edition' utterly magnificent

6-SERIES COUPE/CABRIO ★★★★★

> Anonymous big GT best enjoyed with mighty 40d diesel power. Plenty of room for four – if you fire your passengers into the back via a wood-chipper > **VERDICT:** Under-the-radar GT bruiser, short on sex, but not on appeal

6-SERIES GRAN COUPE ★★★★★

> Coupe? It's a bloody saloon! And £20k more than a same-engined 5-series! BMW must chuckle at every sale. Still, rather nice > **VERDICT:** Desirable enough to leave the 6-series coupe in the shade, and in the showroom

M6 ★★★★★

> Six-figure M5 in a shiny suit is even better to drive. Two-door looks good value beside Merc's S63 coupe, but can't touch a 911 GTs for kicks > **VERDICT:** M6 GC almost makes M5 redundant, but at £100k/18mpg you'll need two jobs

7-SERIES ★★★★★

REPLACED SOON > Bull-nose luxury burge not long for this world and we won't be sending flowers. Drives well, looks awful and the ride fidgets like a toddler with ADHD > **VERDICT:** Takes luxury to K2-heights, but the S-class rocks it up to Everest

X1 ★★★★★

NEW ENTRY > Ugly old one sold by the bucket load; all-new replacement is miles better to look at and to drive. It's a proper mini SUV now... > **VERDICT:** It's even based on the fwd Mini platform. Swallow that bile now

X3 ★★★★★

> Studiously un-gangsta SUV shuns petrol power – and M Power – options for solid diesel-only blend of handling and handiness. Looking better post facelift > **VERDICT:** The BMW SUV we don't hate ourselves for liking

X4 ★★★★★

> Blame the Evoque and people who bought the X6 for this carbuncle. £4-5k more than an X3, but better equipped and annoyingly better to drive > **VERDICT:** Depressing X3 spin-off for grown-ups who still dream of being a footballer

X5 ★★★★★

> One-time Premier League fave looking more like League 1 beside better-driving, and -looking rivals. Skinfint sDrive 25d is a rwd four-banger > **VERDICT:** Still impresses with engines and quality, but thanks to Landie it's lost its lustre

X6 ★★★★★

> All the impracticality of a coupe and all the wasteful high-centred mass of an SUV. Genius. If you must, X40d gives best price/punch/parsimony > **VERDICT:** Pointless pimp wagon. Buy a Porsche Cayenne or even an X5

Z4 ★★★★★

> Sports car for post-menopausal women in lemon trouser suits. Coupe-cabrio roof hits boot space when folded. Base 18i spec sub-Wartburg > **VERDICT:** No match for Boxster. Stick with mid-spec trim. And keep taking the evening primrose

i8 ★★★★★

> Carbon-constructed 3-cyl hybrid supercar that's fun for four, as fast as an M3 and does 40 real mpg. Minor demerit: looks like it's crimping off a 911 > **VERDICT:** Fascinating and fabulous. The future of the sports car is in safe hands

BUGATTI

VEYRON ★★★★★

REPLACED SOON > A decade on, still the ultimate hypercar, although more limited editions than a Vauxhall Nova take some lustre off W16-powered redefinition of what's possible > **VERDICT:** Promise, La Finale is the end of an amazing era – will we ever see its like again?

CATERHAM

SEVEN ★★★★★

> Still the benchmark for bobble-hatted Terry Thomas wannabes, the adaptable Seven comes in flavours from 160 3-cyl to mental road racers > **VERDICT:** 80bhp 160 underpowered, 310bhp 620R lethal, 180bhp 360 model just right

CHEVROLET

CORVETTE ★★★★★

> Farm machinery meets space lab in fabulous 460bhp V8 symphony of composite materials, leaf springs and push rods. Shame it's left-hook only > **VERDICT:** £60k for a bargain berserker. £20k more for the 650bhp Z06

CITROEN

C-ZERO ★★★★★

> Remember when electric cars were expensive, oddly packaged, with hardly any range? If not, refresh your memory with a C-Zero > **VERDICT:** £6k for a Tupperware box. There are cheaper ways to carry your sandwiches to work

C1 ★★★★★

> Trying desperately hard to escape the clutches of its sister cars, the C1 can have a funky Aircscape cloth roof and half-hearted personalisation options. 1.0-litre has most pep > **VERDICT:** Good, solid proletarian urban fare rather than hipster cool

C3 ★★★★★

> Serious sibling rivalry issues as dull C3 loses out to dashing DS3. Now handles a bit better after a refresh, and has five doors. The end > **VERDICT:** If you're not even the most talented in your family, how are you going to beat the rest?

C3 PICASSO ★★★★★

> Compact supermini-based box that's fun to drive (avoiding the petrol one, mind) and well-packaged. Might not set pulses racing, but you'll get very protective of it > **VERDICT:** They can take the piss, but it's a faithful, lovable friend

C4 ★★★★★

> Recently refreshed C4 has all the edginess of a Hush Puppy deck shoe. But it's useful, anodyne transport and sub-100g/km BlueHDi models are very economical > **VERDICT:** Nobody would hate you – or notice you – if you bought one

C4 CACTUS ★★★★★

> An architect's wet dream. Sloppy to drive but offering a roomy family car with kid's toy colour combos. Airbumps will stop it kicking off in the car park > **VERDICT:** Cheap yet brilliant. Why can't the French be this good all the time?

C5 SALOON/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Be aware: this car is still in existence. Slow selling but roomy estate is fairly stylish and

practical with Hydractive rear suspension > **VERDICT:** There have been great French family saloons. This is not one

C4 PICASSO ★★★★★

> Defiantly anti-cool family shifter. Touches like lower rear windows and sprogwatch mirror make mums go weak at the knees for its peace-and-bloody-quiet ambience > **VERDICT:** Drives like a shed. Who cares, if Satan's brood shut up?

BERLINGO MULTISPACE ★★★★★

> Recently refreshed with SUV aspirations, but still a hard-wearing, wipe-clean tin lifeboat for cagoule-wearing Thermos-sipping birdwatchers. Rattles and drives like a van. Is a van > **VERDICT:** Dogging cheapseats for aspiring Bill Oddie

DS3 HATCH/CABRIO ★★★★★

> Surprise winner clad in John Lewis wallpaper prints. A middle-class rethinking of an average supermini. But even sporty 155bhp lacks sparkle > **VERDICT:** Goes with your tablecloth and handbag. Gallic chic still desirable, done right

DS4 ★★★★★

FACELIFT SOON > Jacked up hatchback that's not an SUV, but is sportier than a C4 but not actually very athletic. Work that out. Cool helicopter alloys, though > **VERDICT:** Found: if you recognise this car, please write to 1 de Gaulle Street, Paris, France

DS5 ★★★★★

> Office joker in testosterone world of Serious Business Men. Quite appealing, with a lovely aerostyled cabin. Diesel Hybrid4 a good idea not executed properly > **VERDICT:** Bland ubiquity will always beat charming quirkiness

DACIA

SANDERO ★★★★★

> Cheapest new car on sale not the worst. Yoghurt-pot plastics and pre-Glasnost styling can't detract from a spacious sub-six grand runabout with Renault genes > **VERDICT:** Austerity rocks. Right, Greece?

LOGAN ★★★★★

> Estate looks like a Sandero that's reversed into phone box. Cavernous boot, but dreadfully unrefined thanks to all the brittle plastic and tin > **VERDICT:** You put things in it. It will carry them for you. You can take them out. Job done

DUSTER ★★★★★

> No-nonsense SUV that's ideal for wannabe peacekeepers on a ridiculously small budget. Buy the boggy 4x4 diesel in white for the full UN effect > **VERDICT:** The Neighbourhood Watch will never be the same again

FERRARI

488 GTB ★★★★★

> We were worried the turbos would ruin it, but while we'll miss the 458's 9000rpm wail, the 488 is more playful and even easier to drive. A stunning achievement > **VERDICT:** Even the looks grow on you after a while. Rivals better dust off their gracious loser faces

CALIFORNIA T ★★★★★

> L-plat Ferrari first of Maranello's new turbo cars. Boost management mimics naturally aspirated engines. Looks better, sounds worse > **VERDICT:** Forget the unfair 458 comparisons, it's an SL65 rival and well worthy of the badge

F12 ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS > Jumbo GT with 700bhp turns like a supercar, cruises like a limo and drifts like a nitrous-guzzling M3. 458 gets the girl but this is the better car > **VERDICT:** Multi-talented coupe makes Aventador look as sophisticated as a Piedmontese peasant

LaFERRARI ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS > 1000bhp hybrid hypercar where the electric bits exist to save tenths not icecaps. 499 to be built and all sold despite the £1.2m asking price > **VERDICT:** The greatest single supercar of all time – except maybe the FXX K track version

FF ★★★★★

> Supercar meets Scimitar in this luxurious two-door wagon with a fiendishly clever on-demand 4wd system via second gearbox > **VERDICT:**

Like an arranged marriage, love grows from respect, and certainly not at first sight

FIAT

PANDA ★★★★★

> Spacious city car with 'squirrely' obsession, as roly-poly as the blobby looks suggest. Two-pot TwinAir willing but thirsty when pushed > **VERDICT:** VW Up costs less, drives better and is nicer inside. Grin and bear it?

500/C ★★★★★

FACELIFT SOON > Panda in a retro frock is still a darling amongst trendy urbanites. Endless special editions keep it fresh, driving dynamics keep us underwhelmed > **VERDICT:** Style over substance and a crashy ride. But the style is in high supply

500L/MPW ★★★★★

> Bloaty supermini-sized people carriers, desperately attempting to cash in on city car's chic. Seldom has the point been so massively missed > **VERDICT:** In-car coffee machine option the only purchase excuse

500X ★★★★★

> Compact crossover is Arnold Schwarzenegger of the 500 range – steroidal and somewhat limited in its range of abilities, but actually rather likeable > **VERDICT:** Worthy Nissan Juke alternative works the 500 thing surprisingly well

PUNTO ★★★★★

> Been facelifted more times than Joan Rivers but is somehow still alive. Now reduced to bare-bones range and budget price. We still wouldn't > **VERDICT:** You might be tempted. Don't be

QUBO / DOBLO ★★★★★

> Postman Pat's family wheels? Don't be daft, Pat's retired to the Caribbean and is living off the licencing rights. Drives a Bentley. A red one > **VERDICT:** Van-based MPVs that put practicality first, people second

FORD

KA ★★★★★

> Take one Fiat 500, marginally improve the dynamics then snatch defeat from victory with dull restyle that removes entire reason to purchase > **VERDICT:** Ford's worst car. Noisy, slow, plasticity, too expensive. Buy a used Fiesta

B-MAX ★★★★★

> B-pillar-free Fiesta-based mini MPV gets rear sliding doors for maximum practicality but not the sliding rear seats of some rivals. Firm ride > **VERDICT:** Buy with a 1.0 Ecoboost triple and Zetec trim for maximum school-run fun

FIESTA ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS > Still brilliant after all these years, Fiesta is poised and practical. Terrific new triples make up for an interior that would make the Chinese blush > **VERDICT:** The best driving supermini. Even 1.0 models feel like hot hatches in waiting

FIESTA ST ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS > Feisty Fiesta is fluent where the flat-footed Focus falls. Trying say that quickly with the 180bhp Ecoboost on full reheat: f-ing fatiguing > **VERDICT:** Definitive affordable hot hatch spoiled only by square-wheels ride

ECOSPORT ★★★★★

FACELIFT SOON > Third-world hand-me-down is no fun to drive and reasonably roomy interior ruined by a daft side-opening tailgate. Nissan Juke monsters it > **VERDICT:** A rare Blue Oval balls-up channelling the complacent Mk5 Escort spirit

FOCUS HATCH/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Looking all the better for its 2014 refresh, the Focus shows Ford's chassis engineers know their stuff. So it's just the designers who have lost it > **VERDICT:** Great to drive but the Golf is a more polished destination for your dough

FOCUS ST ★★★★★

> Storming turbo four sounds so good it's almost more than your ears can take. Also more than the front tyres are able to deal with > **VERDICT:** Exciting, but so's contemplating throwing yourself from the Shard. Buy a GTI

MONDEO HATCH/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Delayed so long dealers will soon be doing

RANGE ROVER

“Perfect car for smuggling cash to Switzerland, skiing, turning up at a ball, game shooting and being smug”

MOTS and PDIs at the same time. Huge space and you can even have the 1.0 EcoBoost

> **VERDICT:** Everybody wants them new-fangled SUVs these days, but this is a great family car

KUGA ★★★★★

> Fine-handling MPV now available with a 178bhp diesel – but not a dashboard that doesn't look like an earthquake in a switchgear factory. Small boot > **VERDICT:** Good, but top-end versions stray into X3/Evoque territory

C-MAX/GRAND C-MAX ★★★★★

> More a roomier Focus than full-blown MPV. C-Max delivers driving pleasure to blot out family pain. 7-seat Grand version gets rear sliding doors > **VERDICT:** Rivals are roomier, but none is better to drive. Just pretend it's the wife's

S-MAX ★★★★★

> Tech-obsessed new S-Max exploits latest Mondeo's undercrackers to full effect. Pricey, but still the best of the seven-seaters to drive > **VERDICT:** Toys include electric everything and speed-correcting cruise control. Harder to beat than FC Barcelona

MUSTANG ★★★★★

> GI Henry's finally been posted to Europe and he's cutting in on the TT's dance. At last gets multi-link rear end, but rear-space could be better > **VERDICT:** EcoBoost 4-cyl torquey but tedious; it's the V8 you want, if not its 18mpg thirst

GALAXY ★★★★★

> Goose to the S-Max's Maverick, new Galaxy is based on the same Mondeo-derived platform. Just as high-tech, but more spacious > **VERDICT:** Great if you need a big 7-seater – fits adults in all rows with no human rights violations

GINETTA

G40 ★★★★★

> Pint-sized road-legal racer. Two models: G40R (civilised version, with carpets) and GRDC (actually a race car with numberplates) > **VERDICT:** Tiny, twitchy and top fun. Pick the £35k GRDC and you get entry to a racing championship thrown in

HONDA

JAZZ ★★★★★

> Brilliantly packaged supermini suffers from typical genius-level mismatch of brain: social skills. Ordinary performance, extraordinarily unrefined > **VERDICT:** If a Skoda Fabia had seats this smart, every other supermini would call it a day

CIVIC HATCH/TOURER ★★★★★

> Wilfully different, won't-fully-want-one Ford rival whose big draw is its origami rear seats.

167mph Type-R lands soon (expect big skid marks) > **VERDICT:** Capacious wagon makes most sense but a Golf is still more satisfying

CIVIC TYPE R ★★★★★

> Holy turbos! They've created a monster. Furious new 2.0-litre Type R produces 306bhp and hits 167mph. Scorched 'Ring included > **VERDICT:** Did Dr Frankenstein do the exterior design? If you can live with the looks you'll love the performance

ACCORD SALOON/TOURER

> Ancient second-rate Mondeo rival dies any day, killed off by the market's move to SUVs – and ambivalence to overpriced ordinary saloons > **VERDICT:** Mid-table Championship side to the Mondeo's Champions League winner

HR-V ★★★★★

> It took Honda 10 years to build a second HR-V, and you're still left wondering why they bothered. Almost wilfully generic > **VERDICT:** Jazz platform's magic packaging the only saving grace

CR-V ★★★★★

> Roomy but unremarkable SUV with a choice of two- or four-wheel drive. Unlike most Hondas won't need ear defenders to drown out road noise > **VERDICT:** Kuga has the chassis, Qashqai has the style, but neither is as practical as CR-V

HYUNDAI

i10 ★★★★★

> Five-door city car that balances mature driving experience with strong value – even if it's not as cheap as it was. Five-year warranty, too > **VERDICT:** Basic motoring done not just well but with a dash of style. Mid-spec 1.0 our choice

i20 ★★★★★

> No Fiesta to drive, but it's not as far off as you'd think, while the refinement and comfort offer plenty of compensation for the plain interior > **VERDICT:** Like a pair of corduroy slippers: comfy but rather suggests you've given up on sex

i30 HATCH/TOURER ★★★★★

> Where the current crop of Hyundais got serious – which means it's now in need of a facelift as the mainstream moves ahead again > **VERDICT:** 'Tries hard but lacks imagination' would be the i30's school report card

i40 SALOON/TOURER ★★★★★

> Vast Mondeo rival with huge boot and lots of standard kit. Facelift resembles a lizard with an Audi grille for a mouth > **VERDICT:** Nearly-but-not-quite mainstream alternative plays value card well

ix20 ★★★★★

> Compact MPV and Kia Venga's ugly step-sister; roomy but ultimately forgettable > **VERDICT:** Sorry, what were we talking about?

ix35 ★★★★★

> Slabby looks but neat to drive and nicely built, making the ix35 a worthy Kuga rival. All-new Tucson replaces it soon > **VERDICT:** Not bad at all, but replacement should be even better

SANTA FE ★★★★★

> Biggish SUV has always led Hyundai's assault on the European market from the front. Comfortable, self-assured and easy to live with > **VERDICT:** A Hyundai you can choose without shame. Looks fresher than Waitrose parsnips

i800 ★★★★★

> Massive van-based people carrier that'll seat eight and still have space for their luggage. Ideal for part-time airport mini-cabbers > **VERDICT:** It is what it is: a van with seats in. But it's a nice van

GENESIS ★★★★★

> Luxury saloon hamstrung by unsuitable petrol engine and they-must-be-joking price tag. Has silly new winged badge and handles like a waterbed > **VERDICT:** Step one of Hyundai's move upmarket. Well, it worked for Infiniti. Oh, wait...

INFINITI

Q50 ★★★★★

> Another American-market Japanese premium product that's lost in translation. Shame it wasn't lost at sea on the way over. Hybrid mega quick > **VERDICT:** Like a tiny speck of fluff the Mercedes C-class casually brushes from its sleeve

Q60 COUPE/CABRIO ★★★★★

> Nissan 370Z after a back, sack 'n' crack. No diesel but V6 sounds ace and S models (4ws and LSD) are tidy in the bends. Looks dated > **VERDICT:** Not without merit, but without a hope of talking us out of buying a BMW 4-series

Q70 ★★★★★

> Does it look like a rubbish Maser QP, or a slightly cooler Daewoo Leganza? Either way it's a novelty act without the novelty > **VERDICT:** Worth considering over a 5-series, but only if Harald Quandt ran off with your wife

QX50 ★★★★★

> Blandly-styled EX crossover got a new badge but precious few new fans. Well equipped, but costly to run and not that great to drive > **VERDICT:** Nothing to see here people, move on – to your local BMW dealer and its excellent X3

QX70 ★★★★★

> Striking jumbo jeep comes with more kit than a Knight Rider convention but the lavish cabin is too small and the fuel and tax bills anything but > **VERDICT:** Taxi for Infiniti! Porsche's Cayenne has this one covered, old timer

JAGUAR

XE ★★★★★

> Straight-bat styling hides exotic aluminium chassis and class-leading handling. Bit tight on space though, and engines not a high point

> **VERDICT:** Rivals are better packaged but this is the driver's car in the class and a proper little Jag

XF ★★★★★

> Second-gen XF now 75% aluminium, looks like an over-inflated XE; bigger inside, smaller outside, still a great steer > **VERDICT:** Diddy diesels moo more than a dairy; insert your own joke about cats and cream

XFR ★★★★★

> Massively capable but terminally tweed-wrapped M5 rival that's £10k cheaper, and 20% less rabid, than the real thing. Occasional traction > **VERDICT:** Great chassis; great shame the superb XFR-S looks like such a dog's dinner

XJ ★★★★★

> Questionable styling but unquestionably excellent to drive and with a cabin fit for a Bentley. Lwb cars get extra 125mm of rear room > **VERDICT:** Get a blindfold and guide dog to help you to and from the door and you'll love it

XJR ★★★★★

> Absurdly track-ready limo builds on already ballistic XJ Supersport, but bumps power up to 543bhp and tightens chassis (at expense of ride) > **VERDICT:** More rare-groove than Elvis's first acetate, but spectacular – if you're up front

F-TYPE COUPE/ROADSTER ★★★★★

> Posh pauper's Aston sounds superb, goes well too. Forget basic V6 and choose from V6S and mental V8S. Now with manual and 4wd options > **VERDICT:** So nearly sublime, but Cayman/Boxster duo cost less, entertain more

F-TYPE R ★★★★★

> Ferocious rear-drive coupe-only R gets 543bhp and uprated chassis for an even sharper drive that's less knife-edge than the V8S soft-top > **VERDICT:** Unlike other F-type coupes, this one is £5k more than equivalent cabrio, but feels it

F-TYPE PROJECT SEVEN ★★★★★

> Looks a little too much like the D-type equivalent of the old folks you see standing at the back of rock gigs, but still the best F-type yet > **VERDICT:** Pray for sunshine: it's got 567bhp and the roof takes 20min to erect. Sold out

JEEP

RENEGADE ★★★★★

> Strange but true: yoo-f-targeting junior Jeep is built in Italy alongside Fiat 500X that donates its platform. Even stranger: it's not terrible > **VERDICT:** Lower spec models outdriven by rivals; only the top Trailhawk cuts it in the rough

CHEROKEE ★★★★★

> Gimlet-eyed Disco post-Fiat Cherokee looks like the banjo-playing inbred from *Deliverance*. Despite generous kit count, we'd leave it on the porch > **VERDICT:** Feels too cheap to be premium, too pricey/ugly to beat Qashqai

GRAND CHEROKEE ★★★★★

> Proper off-road credentials backed up by sensible running costs, but feels cheap. Ludicrous SRT8 version demolishes 62mph in five dead > **VERDICT:** Makes sense at \$30k in the US, but doesn't drive or feel like a premium car



THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY.

WRANGLER ★★★★★

> Incredible off-road, and much better than a Defender on it, but that's like saying Pol Pot was more benevolent than Stalin. 2.8 Merc diesel best > **VERDICT:** When North Korea nukes us, this cold war cast-off will be all that's left moving

KÖENIGSEGG

AGERA ★★★★★

> Evolution of Lex Luthor's original CC8S supercar features twin-turbo 5.0 V8 and carbon fibre wheels. R version even runs on E85 biofuel > **VERDICT:** Yahoo! Yin to Volvo's yawning yang keeps Sweden's car output balanced

KIA

PICANTO ★★★★★

> Tough-looking budget Korean mini twinned with less funky Hyundai i10. Three-pot 1.0 is slow but sweeter than 1.25 four. Smart interior, small boot > **VERDICT:** You'll never benefit from the 7-year warranty and VW's Up is better to drive

RIO ★★★★★

> Long on space, short on enjoyment, life with a Rio is no carnival. Diesel refinement will have you driving to a favela in the hope of a carjacking > **VERDICT:** White goods car gets the basics right but there are too many better rivals

CEED HATCH/SW/PROCEED ★★★★★

> Good-looking Korean Golf wannabe is big on equipment and not bad to drive. Ceed is 5dr, Proceed gets 3, and SW is the wagon > **VERDICT:** Entirely credible. Europe's best is still a step ahead, but for how much longer?

SOUL ★★★★★

> Improved second-gen chunky spunky SUV better to drive but ride and noise suppression poor. Petrol version rubbish, but much cheaper > **VERDICT:** A Korean with character but other SUVs are more rounded (in both senses)

OPTIMA ★★★★★

> Eye-catching, but dynamically second-rate Mondeo clone much more appealing for last year's new chairs 'n' dampers refresh. Diesel only > **VERDICT:** Not as bad as its scarcity suggests

VENGA ★★★★★

> Weird sit-up supermini-cum-MPV packs Focus space into near-city-car dimensions. Hard to get comfy though. 1.4 petrol best > **VERDICT:** Too pricey and too ordinary to drive for us to care

CARENS ★★★★★

> Big, versatile, value-packed seven-seater. Go diesel – 1.6 petrol is wheezier than emphysematoid asthmatic with a punctured lung. > **VERDICT:** For all its pseudo-premium Euro aspirations, this is the stuff Kia still does best

SPORTAGE ★★★★★

> Sharply-styled SUV with pillars so fat it's like driving a zoetrope. Well equipped, but not that roomy, or much fun to drive. Choice of 2- or 4wd > **VERDICT:** Strong on paper, but Qashqai and Mazda CX-5 work harder for your coin

SORENTO ★★★★★

> Ambitious new flagship SUV reckons it's a real Land Rover rival. Now bigger than ever, and so is the price: up to £40k. 2.2 diesel only engine. > **VERDICT:** Impressive, but lacks the badge and performance of genuine premium off-roaders

KTM

X-BOW ★★★★★

> 22nd century Ariel Atom from Austria's barmy motorbike maker mixes carbon construction with hardy Audi turbo'd 2.0 four > **VERDICT:** Big money, big grins, but single-seat BAC Mono gives more racecar-like experience

LAMBORGHINI

HURACAN ★★★★★

> Way more accomplished Gallardo successor twinned with new Audi R8. New dual-clutch 'box mandatory. Steer clear of optional 'Dynamic' rack > **VERDICT:** Beats the new 488 for aural excitement, but Ferrari retains its edge when it comes to everything else

AVENTADOR/SV ★★★★★

> The F12 may be better in every respect, but this is what a supercar should look like. Limited run Aventador SV closes that gap with shocking power and agility > **VERDICT:** SV is the one to have. Sub-7min 'Ring lap makes the hybrid hypercar crew look stupidly expensive

LAND ROVER

DEFENDER ★★★★★

> Like Churchill's second term as prime minister, 60-year-old workhorse is anachronistic and out of touch, yet tolerated out of sentiment > **VERDICT:** Roast beef. Concorde. Arkwright's Mill. Six wives. Rain. Defender. Dies this year

DISCOVERY SPORT ★★★★★

> Educated, professional luxury SUV with seven seats replaces badger-baiting, cousin-marrying Freelander. Just one ageing diesel though, in desperate need of Ingenium lump later this year > **VERDICT:** A bit bland by recent LR standards

DISCOVERY ★★★★★

> Middle England metal edifice brilliantly capable at driving over lefty hunt saboteurs, mud and street furniture. Only one diesel > **VERDICT:** Perfectly balances picnicking luxury, farming legwork and small-c conservatism

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE ★★★★★

> The definitive posh mums' SUV. Expensive price offset by superb RVs although wedgy styling means interior space of a half-squeezed toothpaste tube > **VERDICT:** No car has been more perfectly pitched at its intended audience

RANGE ROVER SPORT ★★★★★

> As luxurious as a Rangie, as practical as a Disco, better looking than an Evoque and could follow a Defender cross country. Add in impressive handling and ballistic SVR and diesel versions > **VERDICT:** Nobody likes a show-off

RANGE ROVER ★★★★★

> A benchmark in luxury SUVs. V6 diesel perfectly acceptable, supercharged V8 petrol hilarious > **VERDICT:** The perfect car for smuggling cash to Switzerland, skiing, turning up at a ball, game shooting and being smug

LEXUS

CT ★★★★★

> Pig-ugly premium Prius a bizarre mix of decent handling, woeful performance and a ride so poor it makes a black cab feel like an S-class > **VERDICT:** Rubbish. Wouldn't merit a single sale if company car tax bills were less CO2-focused

IS ★★★★★

> Sharp-suited, well-specced 3-series rival finally gets decent rear space. Good chassis, but 250 V6 irrelevant, and frugal hybrid hobbled by nasty CVT > **VERDICT:** So close. Give this a proper auto 'box and it would be right up there

GS ★★★★★

> GS makes twin-pronged hybrid-only attack on German territory. 450h quicker and handles; 300h is the one to buy (with your company's money) > **VERDICT:** 300 makes company car sense, but don't expect to take the B-roads home

LS ★★★★★

> Monstrously expensive but so refined it makes a library feel like a sound-off competition (which the Mark Levinson hi-fi could probably win) > **VERDICT:** Built for those in the back, but the S-class makes every seat worth buying a ticket for

NX ★★★★★

> Trumps Audi Q5 with a fabulous interior and arrest-me (for persecuting curves) exterior design. Fwd or 4wd with electric motor at rear > **VERDICT:** Doesn't work as a driver's car, so take the NX300h hybrid over faster, costlier NX200t

RX ★★★★★

> Gentle giant Jeep powered by hybridised V6. Loves motorways but steering's so remote it lives in a shepherd's cottage in the Hebrides > **VERDICT:** A CO2 champ and tax beater, but rival diesel SUVs are the real fuel sippers

RC/RC-F ★★★★★

> V8 IS-F successor has the raw ingredients, but chef fried them up with too much lard. With no diesel or hybrid, regular RC's a bit player > **VERDICT:** 4/M4 rival five years late for the party

LOTUS

ELISE ★★★★★

> Reminds just how connected cars used to be. Slothful base 1.6 reminds how they used to go, too, so pick 1.8. Alfa 4C is a pricey, pale imitation > **VERDICT:** Still sensational, but a 10-year old example does the same job for half the price

EXIGE ★★★★★

> Gym-bunny Elise with supercharged V6, but the same beautifully connected unassisted steering. Stripped Cup version is Hethel's GT3 RS > **VERDICT:** The best Lotus, but Cayman GTS and new GT4 match it every step

EVORA 400 ★★★★★

> Thoroughly refreshed Evora loses its looks but gains easier access and thumping supercharged 400bhp > **VERDICT:** Better yet, the chassis is Lotus at its sparkling best. Sublime, but you'll still buy a Cayman

McLAREN

650S ★★★★★

> Original 12C showed real promise, 650S delivers on it. Is there a car with better steering than this? 675LT is McLaren's 458 Speciale > **VERDICT:** If this thing looked like a P1 (rather than just cribbing its eyes) it would be invincible

P1 ★★★★★

> £1m hybrid hypercar with aero straight from McLaren's F1 brains. All sold, and if you haven't got one you can't have track-only GTR either > **VERDICT:** Astounding, but LaFerrari feels more special (as it should for £400k more)

MASERATI

GHIBLI ★★★★★

> A Maserati for the price of a 5-series! A bad-riding one with a disappointing interior, but still, a Maserati! Stingy Italians charge extra for paddles > **VERDICT:** The best badge on your company car list, but not the best car

QUATTROPORTE ★★★★★

> Supersaloon-cum-limo can't decide what it wants to be. Looks great, handles better, rides worse. Twin-turbo V8 rapid; diesel a stopgap > **VERDICT:** Buy it to stretch its legs, not because you want to kick back and stretch your own

GRAN TURISMO COUPE/ROADSTER ★★★★★

> Four genuine seats a rarity in this class, but fill them and you'll regret choosing the weedy 4.2 over the 4.7 at the first sniff of a hill > **VERDICT:** Podgy, pretty, practical GT for folk who hate four-door faux coupes. And luggage

GT MC STRADALE ★★★★★

> Defies hulking 1770kg mass (and that's after a 110kg diet) and modest 444bhp to deliver an engaging driving experience. Epic noise > **VERDICT:** Massively underrated. A GT3 for an Italian lotoario with a 'Ring season pass

MAZDA

2 ★★★★★

> Shot-in-the-arm supermini packs value, handling and looks, leaving sweatmarks on the shirts of VW Polo marketing team. Still a bit Poundland inside > **VERDICT:** Under-radar Fiesta threatener gatecrashes the top table

3 HATCH/SALOON/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Another left-field, right-on Mazda that's great to drive and cheap to run. Like shifting gears? You'll love the 118bhp unblown 1.5. If not, go diesel > **VERDICT:** Don't buy a family hatch until you've tried one. Oh, a Golf? Apart from that

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5 ★★★★★

▶ Ancient off-the-pace MPV that looks like its been side-swiped by a kamikaze dispatch rider. Roomy and reasonable to drive, but just no! ▶ **VERDICT:** Large 'n' loaded but there're too many fresher rivals to warrant wasting your wedge

6 SALOON/TOURER ★★★★★

▶ Boss won't let you have a 3-series? Double your digit and try this impressive alternative. Handles well but rides like the tyres have DTs ▶ **VERDICT:** Swoopily styled, tax friendly, entertaining alternative to po-faced Passat

CX-3 ★★★★★

▶ Late arrival to the compact crossover party, but worth a look thanks to smart, premium cabin and crisp, engaging drive. Pity about the firm ride ▶ **VERDICT:** Pricey, but better than most and well equipped. Ideal MX-5 social life support truck

CX-5 ★★★★★

▶ Crisply styled, commodious crossover is stonking value. Handles tidily but ride and refinement could be better. Pick base fwd diesel ▶ **VERDICT:** MX-5 aside, this is the best thing to come out of Mazda for years

MX-5 ★★★★★

▶ Smaller than the '89 original, and in real terms half the price. 1.5 sweet but a little slow; 158bhp 2.0 quicker but characteristically challenged ▶ **VERDICT:** Brilliantly uncomplicated budget sports car. Dink the GTi for this

MERCEDES

A-CLASS ★★★★★

FACELIFT SOON ▶ Cool in the manner of a skinny, 20-a-day fashionista – the body is writing cheques its heart can't cash. Expensive, cramped and brittle to drive ▶ **VERDICT:** Don't be swayed by the looks, A3 and 1-series do the job better

A45 AMG ★★★★★

FACELIFT SOON ▶ Madly turbocharged four-pot with 355bhp and four-wheel drive. Goes like a banker who knows the game is up; almost as expensive ▶ **VERDICT:** Resets the bar for super hot hatches. Doesn't mean it's the one to have

B-CLASS ★★★★★

▶ Posh MPV big brother to the A-class misses out on the looks and the charisma, but is far more homely and just as technically savvy ▶ **VERDICT:** So boring the BMW 2-series Active Tourer actually begins to make sense

CLA SALOON/SHOOTING BRAKE ★★★★★

▶ CLS clone based on the A-class, now including the Shooting Brake swoopy estate. Lacks gravitas of the former and sex appeal of the latter ▶ **VERDICT:** Just because you can make something smaller doesn't mean you should

C-CLASS SALOON/ESTATE ★★★★★

▶ Latest C impresses with mini S-class looks and almost all the same on-board tech. Denies muttering it wishes the 3-series would drop dead ▶ **VERDICT:** BMW still better to drive, but if you want a relaxing techno cocoon, this is it

C-CLASS COUPE ★★★★★

REPLACED SOON ▶ Currently still a hangover from the previous generation C-class. And no matter how good the party, a hangover is still a hangover ▶ **VERDICT:** Wait for the new version, due later in 2015

C63 AMG ★★★★★

▶ New C63 ditches the old 6.2 V8 for the new twin-turbo 4.0 from the AMG GT. Four-door only; M3 last seen looking for a doctor's note ▶ **VERDICT:** Mega traction and one of the best turbo engines on sale. Gets our vote

E-CLASS SALOON/ESTATE ★★★★★

REPLACED SOON ▶ Large, lovely, but overshadowed by the allure of the CLS – unless you want to look like a German taxi driver ▶ **VERDICT:** The most old-school Merc, which has a certain appeal

E-CLASS COUPE/CONVERTIBLE ★★★★★

▶ CLK-replacing Coupe and Convertible are still C-class derived – and old C-class at that

– despite the name. Both seat four in decent comfort ▶ **VERDICT:** Restrained and tasteful approach to mid-size luxury. Feeling their age

E63 AMG ★★★★★

▶ 5.5-litre V8 twin-turbo with up to 577bhp and rear-wheel-drive only in the UK. Like a BMW M5, but without the artificial enhancement ▶ **VERDICT:** Bit of a blunt instrument. Spectacular soundtrack means you won't care

CLS/SHOOTING BRAKE ★★★★★

▶ The word 'coupaloon' is banned from these pages. Which is fine, because we're all slightly in love with the glamorous Shooting Brake ▶ **VERDICT:** Second-gen version of the original four-door coupe continues to lead the pack

S-CLASS ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS ▶ Enormously technically accomplished, with camera-guided ride quality and stacks of safety kit. Maybach and Pullman variants immensely flash ▶ **VERDICT:** Makes 7-series/A8 seem like toys. Captains of industry should insist on it

S-CLASS COUPE ★★★★★

▶ 5m-long two-door with stunning interior and optional suspension that leans into bends like a motorbike. Barking mad indulgence ▶ **VERDICT:** Buy it as a tribute to your own personal wealth. Don't expect to get let out at junctions

S63/S65 AMG ★★★★★

▶ Twin-turbo 577bhp V8 and 621bhp V12 S-class variants, because being richer than the world isn't enough and you need to out-drag it, too ▶ **VERDICT:** S63 V8 is bonkers, S65 V12 utterly certifiable. Does your chauffeur deserve it?

GLA ★★★★★

NEW ENTRY ▶ GLK replacement project, now available in right-hand drive. Sounds like you shouldn't care, but the interior might just make you moist ▶ **VERDICT:** Rivals are cheaper, better to drive – GLC makes you feel special inside

GLC ★★★★★

▶ Cold War relic that's so solidly built it could ram raid a bank vault. Obscene special editions a growing – literally – Mercedes obsession ▶ **VERDICT:** You shouldn't want one, but... Will outlast any Defender. And possibly the planet

G-CLASS ★★★★★

▶ Cold War relic that's so solidly built it could ram raid a bank vault. Obscene special editions a growing – literally – Mercedes obsession ▶ **VERDICT:** You shouldn't want one, but... Will outlast any Defender. And possibly the planet

GLE / GLE COUPE ★★★★★

▶ Rebadged M-class is heavy, ponderous and depressingly cheap inside. Plug-in hybrid plays the tech card, new Coupe an alternative to X6 ▶ **VERDICT:** As you were: it's perfectly adequate in a class dominated by the outstanding

GL-CLASS ★★★★★

FACELIFT SOON ▶ Massive seven-seater SUV makes the Audi Q7 look demure. Actually off-road capable. Lacks super-lux appeal of latest Range Rover ▶ **VERDICT:** Americans love 'em. Make of that what you will...

SLK ★★★★★

▶ Small, folding hardtop 'sports car', engines range from a clattery diesel to a non-turbo V8 with cylinder deactivation. Neither of which particularly appeals ▶ **VERDICT:** Boxster so much better even your hairdresser could tell

SL ★★★★★

▶ Large, folding hardtop 'sports car'. No diesel option, but you can have a twin-turbo V12. Ferrari California T now stealing its lunch money ▶ **VERDICT:** Fine for cruising that boulevard. If it wasn't for the aforementioned Ferrari

AMG GT ★★★★★

▶ SLS replacement is smaller (just), cheaper (considerably) and blessed with a 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 that will blow your mind ▶ **VERDICT:** It's got the muscle but maybe not the finesse; 911 buyers should still think twice

MG

MG3 ★★★★★

▶ Tough-looking, spacious supermini has

handling that lives up to the promise of that badge. As does the woeful build, crap engine and concrete ride ▶ **VERDICT:** The Chinese are coming! But so far they've only got to Tajikistan

MG6 ★★★★★

STEER CLEAR ▶ Previous woeful also-ran now updated with more efficient diesel, more kit and a hefty price cut ▶ **VERDICT:** Better, but remains condemned by ghastly steering, buzzy engine. Wrong badge, wrong car, wrong owners

MINI

HATCH 3DR/5DR ★★★★★

▶ Bigger and gawdier and less charming, but lovely BMW engines are smooth and peppy, while ride has improved without ruining handling. Five-door in danger of being practical ▶ **VERDICT:** A better ownership proposition than ever, even if you love it a little less

COOPER S/JCW ★★★★★

▶ Up-sized BMW 2.0-litre four-pot-powered 228bhp JCW most powerful Mini ever. Terrific turboed fun, if a tad overwrought and synthetic ▶ **VERDICT:** Beware the options list, lest it lead to bullion robberies and perilous dangling over cliffs

CLUBMAN/COUPE/CONVERTIBLE ★★★★★

▶ A Mini with a toupe, the Coupe is just loopy. Convertible makes more sense but time running out for last-gen models before the next flight of fancy occurs ▶ **VERDICT:** Coupe doesn't add much driving character over standard Mini

COUNTRYMAN/PACEMAN ★★★★★

▶ Bigger Minis for people who don't want slightly smaller (but still quite big) Minis. Paceman even has fewer doors for those phobic of apertures. Niche ▶ **VERDICT:** Please, please make it stop. It's all just so wrong

MITSUBISHI

MIRAGE ★★★★★

STEER CLEAR ▶ Looking for the ideal car to crash into a shopfront when staging a 'Look at this OAP selecting reverse rather than first!' YouTube sensation? This is it ▶ **VERDICT:** Slow, rough, harsh, bad. Sadly it's not a mirage, it's real

ASX ★★★★★

▶ Forgotten among the slew of small SUVs, the ASX is rather good now, with decent ride and sharper looks. Selectable 2/4wd is handy, but engine is rattly and gearbox slushy ▶ **VERDICT:** More workmanlike than many, and better for it

SHOGUN ★★★★★

▶ Great value old-school workhorse for those whose workplace is covered in mud, oil or bomb craters. Big, noisy diesel, chunky underpinnings and reliable, with hose-down cabin ▶ **VERDICT:** If you don't need this car, you don't need this car

OUTLANDER ★★★★★

▶ Workmanlike cabin and infotainment invented when Steve Jobs was in nappies. But the PHEV is a plug-in ahead of the game, offering 30 electric miles ▶ **VERDICT:** The biggest-selling EV on the market shows underdogs can bite back

MORGAN

3-WHEELER ★★★★★

▶ Comfortable as riding over Niagara Falls in a barrel and equally sane. Not as quick as it feels, but quick enough for a three-wheeler on bike tyres ▶ **VERDICT:** Brilliant Caterham alternative without the macho trackday posturing

AERO ★★★★★

▶ Drop-top was first of the new-era Morgans and goes it alone since Aero Supersports, Coupe and Squiffy Perkins bought it at the Somme ▶ **VERDICT:** Two worlds collide. And with 367bhp they may not be the only ones doing the colliding

PLUS 4/FOUR FOUR/ROADSTER ★★★★★

▶ Entry-level Mog still with 'traditional' ash frame and 'traditional' (ie, awful) dynamics. Four-seat 4/4 is surprise eco champ: 44mpg ▶ **VERDICT:** Cheap, considering the craftsmanship, even at £33k, but if you want an old car, buy one!

PLUS 8 ★★★★★

▶ Don't be fooled by tally-ho styling. 8 is built on 'modern' bonded and riveted Aero chassis. Fidgety like a child with worms ▶ **VERDICT:** Classic Morgan style, modern BMW V8 poke, manners like a five-term Borstal veteran

NISSAN

MICRA ★★★★★

STEER CLEAR ▶ As alluring as a dentist's waiting room, and just as noisy – modern Micra is a shadow of its former self and unworthy of your interest ▶ **VERDICT:** Judge this book by its cover: it's dull to drive and just as cheap inside

JUKE ★★★★★

▶ Mould-breaking compact crossover; you think it would look like that if the mould hadn't broken? Cheap interior and so-so dynamics belie the hype ▶ **VERDICT:** Does it still count as 'different' if everybody's got one?

NOTE ★★★★★

▶ Like a Honda Jazz with middle-age spread, this is a small, practical MPV-hatch with limited aspirations of greatness ▶ **VERDICT:** An automotive cardigan: deeply uncool but good at what it does

LEAF ★★★★★

▶ Gawky looking purpose-built electric car proves that life after the internal combustion engine won't be that bad. Gets better with every revision ▶ **VERDICT:** Worth at least a cursory glance on your way to the BMW i3 showroom

PULSAR ★★★★★

▶ So dull it can only be explained by a conspiracy theory claiming it owes its entire existence to a long-range Qashqai sales-boost strategy ▶ **VERDICT:** Buy a Focus. Or a Golf. Or a Ceed. Or an Auris. Okay, maybe not an Auris...

QASHQAI ★★★★★

▶ Second-gen crossover carries on exactly where the original left off: meandering ominously in the middle lane to the tune of 'are we there yet?' ▶ **VERDICT:** Likeable, with a side order of resting on its own laurels

X-TRAIL ★★★★★

▶ The X-Trail used to be a rough-tough off-roader apparently designed on an Etch-a-Sketch. Now it's a Qashqai put through a photocopier at +10% ▶ **VERDICT:** It still ain't exciting. But it's probably going to sell a lot better

GT-R ★★★★★

▶ A monster in every respect, from the way goes to the amount it weighs. 4wd system practically sentient, and it gets faster every year ▶ **VERDICT:** No longer the supercar of the PlayStation Generation, now simply a supercar

PAGANI

HYUARA ★★★★★

▶ Spectacular cottage (villetta?) industry supercar with active aero, AMG-built 720bhp twin-turbo V12 and an interior more decadent than a Roman orgy ▶ **VERDICT:** Want have, can't have: they're all sold. But a roadster is rumoured

PEUGEOT

ION ★★★★★

▶ Rebadged Mitsubishi iMiev seats four, and just as well: with leasing bills at £400/month you'll need passengers to chip in ▶ **VERDICT:** Congestion-charge, road-tax and petrol-bill exempt. Zero-rated for driving pleasure too

108 ★★★★★

▶ Pug-faced city car. Go for 82bhp 1.2: the 68bhp 1.0 is so slow we were all monkeys when it set off and it still hasn't hit 60mph ▶ **VERDICT:** Reasonable no-frills city car but boot and rear space tight. Skoda Citigo is better

208 ★★★★★

NEW ENTRY ▶ Refresh more than just a prettier face as dynamic update adds handling chops to 208's interior chic ▶ **VERDICT:** Pug's recovered that VaVaVoom from the back of the sofa. No, wait – that's the other lot

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

308 HATCH/SW ESTATE ★★★★★

> Handsome, hushed 308 at its best when eating motorway miles, or when you're watching it out of the window of your Golf. Fiddly touchscreen > **VERDICT:** Hatch isn't up to scratch, but roomier SW wagon is worth a look

508 SALOON/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Little-seen XL Pug with unconvincing cod German accent. Hybrid4 gets 4wd via 37bhp 'leccy motor on rear wheels > **VERDICT:** RXH is poor-man's Audi Allroad. Rest of range is padding on your company car list

PARTNER TEPEE ★★★★★

> Spacious, versatile Teepee so useful it could almost be a van. Funny, that. Slothful, spartan, but drives okay and 'real' MPVs can't match practicality > **VERDICT:** Make your own clothes? Live in a Yurt? This is the car for you

2008 ★★★★★

> Welly-wearing 208 is front-drive only, though 'Grip Control' ESP divides torque left to right. Quality cabin, big boot, but Renault Captur prettier > **VERDICT:** Strong, but it's late to the party and wearing a frock made out of coal sacks

3008 ★★★★★

> Get Pininfarina on the phone, this is a code red emergency! Revolting styling totally undermines this roomy and entirely reasonable crossover > **VERDICT:** Hard to work up much of a trouser tent when the Qashqai looks so much sexier

5008 ★★★★★

> Woah! Do they still make that?! Who'd have thought? Stacks of space and at a decent price, but an S-Max is a vastly more satisfying steer > **VERDICT:** Sound medium-MPV choice – if you live 34,678 miles from your nearest Ford dealer

RCZ ★★★★★

> Rough-riding coupe gets a rough ride at the hands of Audi's infinitely more polished TT. Decent handling, messy cabin, useless back seats > **VERDICT:** There are better coupes, but if the styling suckers you, get a brisk RCZ 200

RCZ R ★★★★★

> Sweet bespoke chassis, Torsen LSD and mega 266bhp 1.6 that's both quick and capable of topping 40mpg. But £32k for a Peugeot... > **VERDICT:** RCZ R says Peugeot still knows how to make a great car. They should do it more often

PORSCHE

BOXSTER ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS > Sublime. Base 2.7 costs less than £40k but unless you like sitting on milk crates and being outdragged by hot hatches, go for the 3.4S > **VERDICT:** Cheaper and more versatile than a Cayman, this is surely Porsche's best sports car

BOXSTER SPYDER ★★★★★

> It's no drop-top Cayman GT4, but with the same 911-derived 3.8, a manual gearbox and a special roof that no longer requires a team of boy scouts it is still mega > **VERDICT:** Worth the extra £7k over the Boxster GTS? Why are you even asking that question?

CAYMAN ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS > Tin-top Boxster with the same twin-boot practicality, more power and even sharper handling. Makes F-type look podgy and pricey > **VERDICT:** The definitive 24/7 coupe. Badge snobbery only reason to spend £20k more on 911

CAYMAN GT4 ★★★★★

> Junior GT3 is first Cayman to get more power than current 911. 380bhp, manual 'box, LSD and a grin wider than a Glasgow smile > **VERDICT:** Porsche finally admits that the Cayman and not the halo 911 is its real sports coupe

911 ★★★★★

FACELIFT SOON > Wears a cravat these days (leaves the ripped jeans to the Cayman). Base 3.4 needs working: GTS wants to. Reborn Targa coolest of the lot > **VERDICT:** Still pushes the buttons, and still the only proper sports car to carry the kids too

911 GT3/GT3 RS ★★★★★

> New engines, PDK-only tranny, electric steering and rear steering too for this generation. Epic drive, but aero-heavy RS may be a touch too hardcore > **VERDICT:** Half the price of a 'proper' supercar, but every bit as good, and then some

918 ★★★★★

> Epic 4wd hybrid can waste GTis with 6sec 0-62mph electric mode, then slay Lambos by adding 600bhp V8. Superb electric steering, too > **VERDICT:** Almost overshadowed in the P1-LaFerrari posturing war, but easily as good

MACAN ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS > Baby Cayenne is even better than dad – and Evoque. Base car with Golf GTI 2.0 makes no sense when S and S Diesel are pennies more > **VERDICT:** GT3 RS for trackdays, Cayman GT4 for weekends, this for everything else. Sorted

CAYENNE ★★★★★

> Porsche's cash-cow is a prize German Angus these days, handsome and the best SUV to drive. Turbo V6 S quick, too quiet; Diesel S dynamite > **VERDICT:** Not convinced it's a proper Porker? Turbo S laps the 'Ring in sub-8min

PANAMERA ★★★★★

> Super-sized supersaloon hamstringing by looking like a prom-night 911 stretch limo. Great interior but more buttons than a giant's cardigan > **VERDICT:** Expensive, but no other luxury car drives this well. Turbo a powerhouse, GTS purer

PROTON

STEER CLEAR

SAVVY ★★★★★

> Oddball city car with refinement of a funfair generator, cramped cabin and sub-Chinese plastics. 50mpg sounds okay, but rivals do 70 > **VERDICT:** Proton's best car easily merits its one-and-a-half-star rating. Oh, we don't do half stars

SATRIA NEO ★★★★★

> Lotus-tweaked chassis okay, rest makes Ingmar Bergman's catalogue look like a rom-com box set. Screen rake means pinhead room only > **VERDICT:** 'The ultimate hot hatchback,' Proton claims. They missed a word out

GEN-2 ★★★★★

> Risky, unrefined Focus-sized hatch with a steering wheel mounted so inexplicably low driving feels like performing a kettle bell exercise routine > **VERDICT:** If you buy one, leave your brain to science. We need to know

RADICAL

SR3 SL ★★★★★

> Properly type-approved (street legal) SR3 gets a 300bhp blown Ford 2.0 instead of a bike motor, a heater and even a 12v socket. It's almost lavish! > **VERDICT:** Toned down for occasional road use but still hairier than a cave man with hypertrichosis

RXC TURBO ★★★★★

> Play out those Le Mans fantasies on the commute with this Peterborough-built Polaris. Sequential 'box welcome in town like an EDL demo > **VERDICT:** When you've outgrown your Caterhams and 911 GT3s, here's the answer

RENAULT

TWIZY ★★★★★

> Part electric scooter, part social experiment, it's easy to love the doorless Twizy, especially on balmy evenings along La Croisette. Grimy days in Doncaster a tougher ask > **VERDICT:** Transportation of the future, if it's never wet in the future and you like chatting at traffic lights

ZOE ★★★★★

> Delightful little EV, now with increased range and cabin like a spa waiting room. Overall purchase now offered alongside confusing battery leasing option > **VERDICT:** Zen-like calmness replaces nagging range anxiety

TWINGO ★★★★★

> Rear-engined rwd runabout isn't as nippy as it sounds, but is roomy, with clever smartphone connectivity. More cheeky than sister Smart, and cheaper > **VERDICT:** Lower-power version with '80s F1 Turbo paintjob the way to go

CLIO ★★★★★

> Welcome return to form for the five-door Clio with even boggo ones looking handsome, a well sorted cabin and sprightly driving qualities. Three-cylinder turbo petrol a (slowly) hoot > **VERDICT:** Fiesta more fun, Clio more stylish

CLIO RS ★★★★★

> Everything you expect from an RS: fab ride quality, sharp looks, superb handling. Did we mention the naff twin-clutch 'box or cheaper Fiesta ST? Oh, bugger > **VERDICT:** Like Harry H Corbett, a potential great typecast by one part

CAPTUR ★★★★★

> It's a Clio on stilts – but that's not necessarily a bad thing. No 4x4 pretensions means focus is on personalisation. Good engines. No Juke to drive > **VERDICT:** Technicolour clown car if you're not careful with the spec, otherwise okay

MEGANE HATCH/TOURER/CABRIO ★★★★★

REPLACED SOON > Despite a facelift, Megane is creaking like an octogenarian's hips. Sport Tourer offers photocopyer repairman practicality, Coupe-Cabriolet is Bournemouth retirement fodder > **VERDICT:** 'Drive the Change' is Renault's slogan. Could do with driving it faster

MEGANE RS ★★★★★

> RS 265 turns average stock into hot-hatch genius, with stripped cabin, manual 'box and raucous 2.0 Turbo. Spartan, more powerful Trophy-R is bonkers > **VERDICT:** What happens when RenaultSport, not marketers, build cars

GRAND SCENIC ★★★★★

REPLACED SOON > Contraception failed, shotgun marriage, working harder to pay for it, old friends don't come round any more, debt, and a Grand Scenic > **VERDICT:** Tired, lacking spark, plodding through each day. And that's just the car...

KADJAR ★★★★★

> Did Nissan leave the Qashqai parts bin store 'Kadjar', or did Alliance partners Renault break in like crossover copycat ninjas? Either way, this is the outcome > **VERDICT:** And actually, it's not a bad one. Good looking, smooth riding, but disappointing interior plastics

ROLLS-ROYCE

GHOST ★★★★★

> A little posher, with more bespoke options to hide BMW-ness, new gearbox for the V12 and minor fettling to the metal. > **VERDICT:** Perfectly built and pitched and more individual. A Phantom for millionaires not billionaires

WRAITH ★★★★★

> A 624bhp twin-turbo V12 sporting vehicle that drives like no other. Dismisses distance but would never lower itself to squeal through bends > **VERDICT:** Whisper it, but Rolls has produced an amazing driver's car

LEASE ACADEMY: FRUGAL FAMILY HATCHES

Every month we trawl the leasing brokers to find the hottest deals. Think before you buy!

Ford Focus 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium X Navigation £232pm

Tiny petrol has big heart, and updated Focus is once again a whizz to drive. This is fully loaded, too
Spec: 1.0 turbo petrol, fwd, 6spd, 123bhp, 60.1mpg, 108g/km
List price: £22,595
£232/month for 48 months
Initial payment: £1394
Mileage allowance: 10,000/year
Via: GoGreenLeasing.co.uk



VW Golf 1.0 TSI Match Bluemotion 5dr £247

Again proving power of residual values, sub-100g/km petrol Golf is great value (if low on kit)
Spec: 1.0 turbo petrol, fwd, 6spd manual, 113bhp, 67.5mpg, 99g/km
List price: £20,395
£247/month for 48 months
Initial payment: £742
Mileage allowance: 10,000/year
Via: AlphaContracts.co.uk



BMW 116d EfficientDynamics Plus £238pm

New 1.5-litre triple makes this the most efficient diesel BMW ever – and it's still great to drive
Spec: 1.5 turbo diesel, rwd, 6spd manual, 114bhp, 83.1mpg, 89g/km
List price: £23,095
£238/month for 48 months
Initial payment: £1425
Mileage allowance: 10,000/year
Via: FleetPrices.co.uk



Peugeot 308 GT 2.0 BlueHDI 180 £278pm

Diesel version of 208 GT warm hatch suffers with auto 'box but provides 179bhp with just 103g/km
Spec: 2.0 diesel, fwd, 6spd auto, 179bhp, 70.6mpg, 103g/km
List price: £25,945
£278/month for 48 months
Initial payment: £1673
Mileage allowance: 10,000/year
Via: CarLeasing-Online.co.uk



PHANTOM ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS

> Simply the best luxury car money can buy, with a cabin to embarrass a superyacht, opulence to make Donatella Versace blush (if she could), and a turbo V12 pulling you along. Not that you'll hear it > **VERDICT:** Every car on earth starts with ambitions of being a Phantom

SEAT

MII ★★★★★

> Tedious-looking city-box is far less funky than Renault's Twingo but roomier and good to drive. You don't look at the mantelpiece, and all that > **VERDICT:** VW Up more desirable, pretty Skoda Citigo cheaper. Siesta time in Seat's prod dept?

IBIZA HATCH/SC/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Angular, angry-looking supermini, possibly because it knows how much better a Fiesta is to drive. It's not bad though, and ST wagon is huge > **VERDICT:** Not as sporty as it likes to think, but holding up in face of newer, better-driving rivals

IBIZA CUPRA ★★★★★

> Bags more attitude than Polo GTI, and 180bhp turbo'd, supercharged 1.4 means it's not short of pace and hates fuel stops. DSG only, sadly > **VERDICT:** Fast and feisty junior hot hatch, but outdriven by key rivals. Make ours a Fiesta ST

TOLEDO ★★★★★

STEER CLEAR

> OAP special whose sole interesting feature is that while it looks like a boring saloon, it's actually a boring hatch! Massive interior > **VERDICT:** This and identical Skoda Rapid duke it out for UK's dullest car. Czech please!

LEON HATCH/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Bigger third-gen Leon gets the same MQB platform as Golf and A3, but only 150+bhp cars get multi-link rear. Ride and cabin plastics brittle > **VERDICT:** Sound, value-focused in-house Golf rival. ST wagon with 1.4TSI gets our cash

LEON CUPRA ★★★★★

> Stupidly rapid 280's mid-range pull makes Golf GTI sister look like a tickled up 1.2. Front-drive, so expect 300 miles from a set of fronts > **VERDICT:** Huge amount of hot hatch for the cash – or hot wagon, in case of stylish Cupra ST

ALTEA ★★★★★

> Remember when all Seats had grilles like merkins? The genital garnish is alive and well in this old MPV. Longer XL's boot is a third bigger > **VERDICT:** Handles okay but the cheap plastic interior has all the ambience of a township hut

ALHAMBRA ★★★★★

FACELIFT SOON

> Seat's biggest box has seven real seats. Such good family wheels even CARs rear-drive-loving Ben (out of shape) Barry became an MPV convert > **VERDICT:** Brilliant big bus does everything VW Sharan sister can for less lolly

SKODA

CITIGO ★★★★★

> Skoda's all but identical version of the VW Up and Seat Mii. Pick your badge – they're all well packaged but too noisy and slow > **VERDICT:** Cheaper than the Up, but not by much. Hyundai i10 also worth a look. Yes, actual advice!

FABIA HATCH/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Very mature little supermini with bodywork creases a Corby trouser press would be proud of. Estate version ideal for Jack Russells > **VERDICT:** Roomy, well made and unexciting – like a low-rent VW Polo. Which is what it is

RAPID HATCH/SPACEBACK ★★★★★

STEER CLEAR

> Long, narrow notchback hatch is automotive equivalent of Eastern Europe refugee. Big boot. Spaceback is shorter, more 'stylish', still dross > **VERDICT:** Unless you've got a lot of potatoes and no other way to carry them, just don't

OCTAVIA HATCH/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Basically the same as a Golf and A3 underneath, but bigger, cheaper and more functional inside. Hot vRS versions old-school ballistic fun. 4x4s practical > **VERDICT:** It's a lot of car for the money

SUPERB SALOON/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Ginormous budget limo alternative is packed with value, refinement and comfort, and neat to drive estate 'loads' better to look at. Taxi for CAR! >

VERDICT: There's a new one inbound, but don't be put off the old one if the deal is right

ROOMSTER ★★★★★

> Hipster lifestyle accessory without the hip. Which is no surprise as it's getting on a bit now. Flexible seating = loads of room for people and kit > **VERDICT:** Modern equivalent of a Fiat Multipla: ugly but useful. We'd call it Igor

YETI ★★★★★

BEST IN CLASS

> Ikea wardrobe on wheels – so practical you'll wonder how you ever lived without it. Good news is you don't have to assemble it yourself > **VERDICT:** Bigger engines are better. Choose the Outdoor version for that rugged look. Grrr

SMART

FORTWO ★★★★★

> Chunkier new ForTwo has middle-age spread compared to the last one. Wider, with a much better ride, higher quality cabin and slicker auto, it is older, but wiser > **VERDICT:** Less of a compromise, and still a brilliant city runabout

FORFOUR ★★★★★

> Renault/Merc tie-up means ForFour is accomplished with a classy cabin, although ludicrous pricing seem at odds with budget city car buyers > **VERDICT:** Sister car Twingo is more than two grand cheaper. Work that out

SSANGYONG

KORANDO ★★★★★

> Borderline rubbish to drive but more practical than the Teflon-coated trousers you're probably wearing if you're giving it serious consideration > **VERDICT:** Huge, handy and hellish value, but we'd have a pre-reg Qashqai or CX-5 any day

REXTON W ★★★★★

> Like that weird 1960s Izal bog roll, Rexton kind of does the job, but is hard and shiny to the touch and not that nice to use. Deals better with mud > **VERDICT:** Plenty of space, but dynamically, like Izal, it's gone down the pan

TURISMO ★★★★★

> Marginally less odious than the old Rodius, but every bit as practical, this giant 7-seater is slower than the Crossrail boring machine > **VERDICT:** Has mini-cab written all over it, or soon will, which will handily help disguise the ugliness

TIVOLI ★★★★★

> There's no getting away from it: Korea's also-ran carmaker (...) has built itself a bit of a contender. Great value, spacious and – shock – well-finished inside > **VERDICT:** Enough to erase decades of dross? No. But it's a good start

SUBARU

IMPREZA ★★★★★

> Yes, it still exists beyond WRX and STi. No, you don't want one. Boggo Impreza reduced to a 1.6 petrol hatchback only with optional CVT. Shudder > **VERDICT:** Have you got a brand new combine harvester? It's probably a better drive

WRX/STi ★★★★★

> Sorry WRX, I'm breaking up with you. It's not you, it's me. No, it is you, it's definitely you and your crashy ride, nasty dash and inflexible engine > **VERDICT:** Brilliant, on its day, in its day. But that was yesterday, so let's call it a day

XV ★★★★★

> Hopelessly expensive half-way SUV half-wit. Suspension thumps so intrusive you'll think the Stomp musical is performing in the wheelarches > **VERDICT:** In the tough crossover market Subaru makes up the numbers, and the price

FORESTER ★★★★★

> Appealingly functional square-rigger the kind of crossover that existed before we had 'lifestyles'. Good on road, great off it, but not cheap > **VERDICT:** Old-school Subaru honest, charming. Tweed cap, pipe, sheep flock optional

OUTBACK ★★★★★

> The unloved Legacy's only UK legacy is this Allroad-style crossover. New for spring 2015, it's huge inside and the 4x4 look isn't all for show > **VERDICT:** Still more niche than a cragside crevice. Dependable, not desirable

Spec Expert

EQUIP THE PERFECT MERCEDES GLC

Merc's new compact crossover piles on the style – here's how to spec one to impress

Mercedes' answer to the Audi Q5 and BMW X3 doesn't overwhelm you with engine choice, as there are just two variants of 2.1-litre turbodiesel on offer at launch: £34,280 GLC220d and £35,435 GLC250d. Pick the latter; £1155 more for an extra 33bhp yet the same mpg and CO2.

Starting price: £35,435



There is such a thing as too much AMG – avoid the tacky 'AMG carbonfibre with aluminium' interior finish and stick with no-cost black ash. Most buyers will pick the standard Artico artificial leather for the seats, but we say take the real hide at £795 and enhance the already luxurious interior ambience. **Running total: £40,220**

Must-have options, according to Mercedes, are the £1695 Premium Package and £1495 air suspension. Save your pennies on the latter, and instead go straight to the Premium Package Plus at £2995 – which adds Burmester hi-fi, traffic-sign assist and COMAND online to the standard version's panoramic sunroof, keyless go and memory seats. **Running total: £43,215**



TOTAL PRICE: £43,215

As it is with Audi's S line and BMW's M-Sport, most Merc buyers opt for AMG Line trim these days. Yes, it's £3990 extra, but you get a hell of a lot of kit in exchange – including 'intelligent' LED lights, heated seats and sat-nav. Plus the upgraded looks are mean. **Running total: £39,425**

Complement the AMG spec's aggression with a classic muted shade, rather than a garish red or modish brown. Obsidian Black Metallic is top choice, but plain standard black saves you £645. **Running total: £39,425**

Most buyers are expected to upgrade the AMG-standard 19in alloys the optional 20in multispeaks. But we'd keep the sexy-looking former rims, and enjoy a more cossetting ride. **Running total: £39,425**



Stop there, and be happy. Or add the £1695 Driver Assistance Package if you're the nervous type, the £750 electrically operated tow hitch if you're horsey, and/or the £495 Off-Road Package. **Running total: £43,215**

BRZ ★★★★★

> Gloriously simple but under-nourished rear-drive Boxer coupe, crying out for Lichfield Imports' 280bhp supercharger kit. GT86 twin is £500 more > **VERDICT:** Loveable car we wanted them to make but you don't want to buy

SUZUKI

CELERIO ★★★★★

> Braking-phobic city car otherwise spacious, full of kit and cheap. Three-cylinder petrol only plus all the handling vim of a B&Q Value wheelbarrow > **VERDICT:** Dowdy and rowdy. Be glad you've got DAB and a cupholder

SWIFT ★★★★★

> An unsung hero, and not just the excellent 136bhp Sport. Handles well, spacious and cheap. 1.2 petrol soon to be replaced by Dualjet motor > **VERDICT:** Buy one and challenge anyone who questions your choice to a fistfight

SX4 S-CROSS ★★★★★

> The cheap way to clone a Qashqai. Won't score any points for style, in fact you might hide it at the back of the school car park. Diesel is the best bet – you'll have to stop and get out less > **VERDICT:** A crossover to be cross over

JIMNY ★★★★★

> A box with a four-wheel-drive system bolted onto the bottom, and a 1.3-petrol engine hanging out front. There are seats too > **VERDICT:** The swamps the Jimny can easily drive over were probably primordial when it first launched

VITARA ★★★★★

> Two-tone cross-dresser to rival the Juke, with a handsome body and usefully economical diesel engine. Cabin could do with some work though > **VERDICT:** Ruttin' Rhinos and pink paint are a thing of the past: it's a serious family car now

TESLA

MODEL S ★★★★★

> Embarrassing car makers everywhere who said it can't be done, the staggering electric Model S has near 400-mile range, alluring infotainment and in the P85d, hyperdrive > **VERDICT:** Star Trekking, across the universe, in the Tesla Model S along with Elon Musk...

TOYOTA

AYGO ★★★★★

> Bright-looking, stupidly-cramped city car with a characterful three-pot motor is as cheap to run as it feels. See also (ropey) Citroën C1, Pug 108 > **VERDICT:** As 'Up'hill struggles go, battling VW with this is like climbing north face of the Aygo

YARIS ★★★★★

> Sizeable but soulless, Yaris can't match rivals' dynamics or pocket luxury feel. Clever but costly hybrid version slashes fuel bills and boot space > **VERDICT:** Largely joyless supermini last to be picked for the school football team

AURIS ★★★★★

> Most Aurises sold are hybrids, mainly 'cos rest of the range is pants and other makers haven't got their hybrid acts together yet > **VERDICT:** Only worth picking as company wheels if you have a Starbucks-like aversion to paying tax

PRIUS ★★★★★

> Massively practical, thanks to the big cabin and boot, not the think-of-a-number mpg figure. Now available as a plug-in, for a premium > **VERDICT:** The original tofu eater offers as little to the taxman as to the guy behind the wheel

AVENSIS SALOON/TOURER

> Journeyman company car is like a small oil-field drill: does little well – despite new BMW diesels. Tourer marginally more stylish > **VERDICT:** White goods. Also available in light grey, medium grey, dark grey. Not beige, oddly

VERSO ★★★★★

> Safe, stodgy seven-seater with snore-worthy chassis and a big-selling BMW-sourced 1.6 diesel that feels like half its horses are asleep too > **VERDICT:** Does as little badly as it does well, but easy meat for Ford C-Max or Citroën Picasso

RAV4 ★★★★★

> Was a soft-roader pioneer back in '94 but has settled for fluffy slippers in its old age. Trump card is boot big enough for a casino table > **VERDICT:** Roomy, reasonable, unremarkable. More dynamic SUVs deserve your dosh

LAND CRUISER/V8 ★★★★★

> Actually two distinct models but both proper bare-knuckle ladder-frame brawlers that wouldn't know a latte if you spilt it on their rigger's boots > **VERDICT:** Awful, but if we were stranded in the desert we'd trust it over a Range

GT86 ★★★★★

> Identical to Subaru BRZ but dealers have actually sold more than three. Same delectable handling, shameful dearth of go from unblown 2.0 > **VERDICT:** Sensational to drive, but such hard work only a handful of folk have found out

VAUXHALL

VIVA ★★★★★

> It may look like it was dropped before it had set, but is comfy, roomy and refined for a city car, and comes with plenty of standard kit > **VERDICT:** More generous than it may appear at first glance. We'd still buy an Up, though

ADAM/ADAM ROCKS ★★★★★

> Obese Fiat 500 wannabe with huge options list and comedy naming shtick. Adam S warm hatch worth a thought; Rocks crossover flaccid > **VERDICT:** Revitalised by new 1.0-litre turbo triple. Buy a paper bag and try it

CORSA ★★★★★

> Made-over Corsa looks like a prime candidate for When Plastic Surgery Goes Bad, but it is more refined and better to drive. 1.0T a good motor > **VERDICT:** Fiesta still cheerfully waving from way out in front. The git

CORSA VXR ★★★★★

> Luton's granny mugger now a grand cheaper and smoother round the edges. An extra £2.4k gets you a slippery diff and hardcore suspension. Thug life. > **VERDICT:** Honed hooinigan. Fiesta ST keeps its crown, but there's no shame in picking one of these

ASTRA HATCH/ESTATE ★★★★★

> The girl next door – often unnoticed but actually quite a looker, easily available and with some punchy engines, too. Needs a tidy-up inside > **VERDICT:** Never quite on par with Focus or Golf; new one coming soon

ASTRA GTC/VXR ★★★★★

> Three-door Astra coupe svelte enough to stand comparison to the Scirocco, makes the Focus look like a lard-arse. VXR fearsomely fast but moody > **VERDICT:** A desirable Vauxhall! If only the inside was as nice as the outside

CASCADA ★★★★★

> Brave attempt to take on German compact cabriolets, but chassis has less integrity than Sepp Blatter. Good value if you don't mind the image (What image? Exactly!) > **VERDICT:** Marty McFly wouldn't. Doc Emmett Brown just might

INSIGNIA SALOON/TOURER

> Much improved by mid-life facelift, still handsome, spacious and loaded with kit. And then along came the all-new Mondeo and Passat > **VERDICT:** An out-of-date car in a dying sector, latest rivals leaving it behind

MERIVA ★★★★★

> Suicide is painless, goes the theme tune to M*A*S*H*, clearly not referring to tight car parks and the Meriva MPV's back-to-front rear doors > **VERDICT:** Nice idea, but does anyone care about mainstream MPVs anymore?

ZAFIRA TOURER ★★★★★

> Large MPV with slick seating arrangement and much more spacious than the old bus it replaced. Struggles in the face of S-Max greatness > **VERDICT:** Accomplished but out-flanked by crossovers' rise to dominance

MOKKA ★★★★★

> Pardon? What? Sorry – you're saying the noisy diesel engine has been replaced? Marvellous. What about the ride and handling? Oh > **VERDICT:** Chunky outside, intricate inside, wearing to drive. Want to like it. Don't

ANTARA ★★★★★

> Old-fashioned SUV based on the Chevrolet Captiva. Chevrolet has subsequently quit selling cars in the UK altogether. You do the maths > **VERDICT:** Comprehensively outclassed by Kuga etc. Felt dated at launch in 2007

VXR8 ★★★★★

> Like a fancy can of extra-strength imported lager, this Australian brute looks the part and packs a (577bhp) punch > **VERDICT:** Like that can of lager, it's still essentially quite unpleasant on the inside

AMPERA ★★★★★

> Futuristic range-extender tech and funky looks, but sales volumes too low to make re-engineering it for Euro 6 emissions worthwhile > **VERDICT:** Eco car killed by eco regs. We're not even joking. Expiry date September 2015

VOLKSWAGEN

UP ★★★★★

> Box on wheels with VW badge is the kind of city car the Japanese have been building for years, except much better quality > **VERDICT:** Hyped as a revolution and hardly that. But a spacious small car with a strong image

POLO ★★★★★

> Bothered by the Fiesta's Airfix plastics? Buy a Polo instead – brilliant engines, bank-vault build quality and almost as good as the Ford to drive > **VERDICT:** Small capacity turbo petrols are a riot, and increasingly efficient, too

POLO GTI ★★★★★

> Baby GTI right down to the tartan seats, now with bigger balls. Vastly improved by introduction of manual gearbox. Surprisingly strong value > **VERDICT:** Where's the nearest Byron Burger drive-thru?

GOLF HATCH/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Squeaky-clean image, quality, refinement and safety put this at the top of the family car class. So it's a swot. And we all know swots are boring > **VERDICT:** The obvious choice. A3 offers extra flash for a bit more cash, Focus better to drive

GOLF CABRIOLET ★★★★★

> The swot's sexy top-dropping sister promises open-air thrills but remains a sensible homebody at heart. Your parents would approve > **VERDICT:** Or will you always be thinking about the A3 Cabriolet you almost bought?

GOLF GTD/GTI/R ★★★★★

> GTD is your dad in running shoes. GTI is your dad when he was wild, young and free. R is your dad having a mid-life crisis. All are ace > **VERDICT:** After seven generations, VW has this hot-hatch thing nailed. Buy without regret

GOLF SV ★★★★★

> The artist formerly known as the Golf Plus. And by 'artist' we mean medium-sized MPV. The car you always knew the Golf would grow up to be > **VERDICT:** Not a bad choice, but now the BMW 2-series Active Tourer is breathing down its neck

JETTA ★★★★★

> Utterly anonymous and the only VW people will assume is a Skoda. Based on old Golf platform > **VERDICT:** Take a good, long, hard look at yourself. And snap out of it

BEEETLE HATCH/CABRIO ★★★★★

> Although better to drive it lacks the design purity of its predecessor and the charm of the original. Unusually indulgent, by VW's standards > **VERDICT:** Even wannabe retro hipsters are, like, so totally over this cynical marketing exercise, man

SCIROCCO ★★★★★

> Old Golf in a slinky dress. Scrubs up well. Fun, friendly, and more generous in the back than Audi TT > **VERDICT:** Ballistic R version definitely worthy; low-power diesel not so much

PASSAT SALOON/ESTATE ★★★★★

> Interior design and refinement so good it shames some limos, cutting-edge kit and elegant looks. If only it wasn't so dull to drive > **VERDICT:** Mega mile-muncher for the undemanding pilot. Aesthete to Mondeo's athlete

CC ★★★★★

> Previous Passat on a night out – but we aren't talking clubbing and a kebab. Dangerously close to being genuinely sexy, even if it is a CLS knock-off > **VERDICT:** Like all the best knock-offs, it's almost as good and much cheaper

PHAETON ★★★★★

> Aka VW's folly. The luxury car for people who don't want to be seen owning a luxury car. Which is how many people? Exactly > **VERDICT:** Once a mighty feat of engineering over good sense. Old, outclassed and irrelevant

TOURAN ★★★★★

> This is not just a van-like people carrier. This is a Volkswagen van-like people carrier. Doesn't go camping unless there's a yurt involved > **VERDICT:** Only buy if you definitely don't want any more kids. C-Max so much better

SHARAN ★★★★★

> Large seven-seater sliding-door people carrier. Nice enough but made to look silly by the all-but-identical and significantly cheaper Seat Alhambra > **VERDICT:** Get the same car from Seat for less. Or try the Ford Galaxy

TIGUAN ★★★★★

> Superbly well-engineered and undemanding compact SUV. Anonymous in a reassuring kind of way. Big seller, for good reason > **VERDICT:** Like a Golf on stilts, it does the job – very well

TOUAREG ★★★★★

> The people's Porsche Cayenne. Do the people still want their own Cayenne? Well, it is nearly £10k cheaper... > **VERDICT:** Big, comfy, competent SUV. Great on and off road

VOLVO

V40 ★★★★★

> Smart Swedish effort in a sector dominated by Germans with efficient D4 engine and impressive kit. But it's a bit bloated in seat, suspension and steering feel > **VERDICT:** Sitting uncomfortably between Golf and A3. A rock and hard place

S60 ★★★★★

> A sporting saloon that, well, just isn't thanks to steering that seems to be bored with driving. Serious identity crisis ensues, although R Design models look smart enough > **VERDICT:** Volvo gambled on a 3-series rival and lost

V60 ★★★★★

> A Frenchman who can't cook. A Jackson who can't dance. A Volvo estate which can't carry much. No such things against the very nature of being exist, do they? > **VERDICT:** Handsome, safe, efficient estate hamstrung by one issue...

V70 ★★★★★

> Make every V60 designer live in the boot of a V70 until they understand Volvo estates. Ageing, slow, and now diesel only, but as comfy as a rest home > **VERDICT:** Please Volvo, never veer from this template, not for fashion or economy

S80 ★★★★★

> Numb steering, wafy ride, feeling you should have bought a 5-series, decent, strong diesel engines > **VERDICT:** The S80 is like carpet slippers: it does pottering about well, but is ill-suited to anything else

XC60 ★★★★★

> Space, sharp looks, competitive pricing, family safety and a wipe-clean cabin. Only grumbles are grumbly D5 diesel engine and high CO2 > **VERDICT:** Volvo really is good at SUVs. XC60 hard to beat, even by much newer competitors

XC70 ★★★★★

> A V70 in breeches, with raised ride height and 4x4 option. Awd starts at less than 40 grand, which is good value if you find SUVs cross > **VERDICT:** If you don't like having a dozen brace of shot pheasant in your boot, don't buy one

XC90 ★★★★★

> It was worth the (long) wait: luxurious seven-seat interior, a smorgasbord of clever safety tech, efficient four-cylinder and plug-in drivetrains, and refined drive > **VERDICT:** The handsome new XC90 is one of the most complete cars on sale at any price

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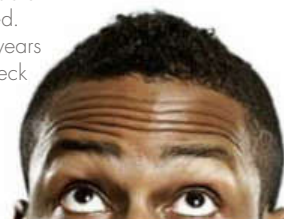
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Worst TV cop cars

How rubbish must TV bad guys be if they can't evade capture by cops driving this bunch of shambolic crocks? By **Chris Chilton**



1 **BERGERAC** TRIUMPH 2000 ROADSTER

It was lucky for Jersey cop John Nettles that he lived on an island just nine miles long, because he really would have to

triumph over adversity to catch baddies in this 75mph nail. Unsurprisingly Nettles hated the car; the Rover 75 he drove in *Midsomnambulant Murders* suited him better.

2 **A TOUCH OF FROST** VOLVO 240

David Jason's bristle-lipped, tweed trilby-topped DI is about as uncool as cops come and he had the car to match. Frost's choice of wheels started off badly and got worse following an altercation with a skip that necessitated swapping his mangled Sierra GL for a Volvo 240 – finished in the same insipid flat blue.



3 **INSPECTOR MORSE** JAGUAR Mk2

No wonder John Thaw's Oxford-based plod was a miserable git. Instead of the sexy chrome wires and grunty 3.8 beloved of '60s baddies, his Mk2 was saddled with steel rims and a tiddly 2.4 straight-six that couldn't crack three figures – and guzzled four-star like Morse necked ale while trying.

4 **STARSKY AND HUTCH** FORD GRAN TORINO

What car could be better suited to undercover work than a bright red muscle car with a giant Nike tick on the side? Actually 'muscle' is too generous for this smog-era whale. To get some go from the strangled 5.7 V8 the TV crew fitted such a low axle ratio it could barely top 50mph.



4 **MIAMI VICE** DE TOMASO TESTAROSSA

You probably know about Sonny Crockett's cross-dressing Corvette-based Daytona. Having initially turned down requests for a car, Ferrari saw red and coughed a pair of Testarossas. But that wasn't the end of the vice on *Vice*: the Testarossa used in the action scenes was actually a rebodied De Tomaso Pantera.



6 **CAGNEY AND LACEY** DODGE DIPLOMAT

Bullitt got a blue-collar hero Mustang on American Racing rims and aristocratic Inspector Lynley swanned around in a Jensen Interceptor and a Bristol. But poor old Cagney and Lacey made do with a car so square it looked like it must have been drawn by Tyne Daly's on-screen five-year-old.

7 **COLUMBO** PEUGEOT 403

In 22 years we never once meet the wife Columbo claims to have. But given the state of his car we suspect he was actually one of those hoarding loners who lives with his mother's corpse and has to pothole his way over 7ft high columns of old newspapers in his lounge to get to the kitchen.



8 **IRONSIDE** FORD POLICE VAN

Having a wheelchair-bound character front a primetime TV show was a big deal in 1967, but Motability cars have certainly improved since Raymond Burr was forced to ride around in the back of a windowless pre-war van like some freak too gruesome to be seen. Stealthy, but glacially slow.



9 **CANNON** LINCOLN CONTINENTAL

Only one thing protruded further than actor William Conrad's paunch: the bonnet of this detective turned PI's Lincoln Continental. Body control sloppier than a bucket of wallpaper paste was never going to make it much 'cop' in a chase, but Frank Cannon did have an early car phone in his arsenal: proper Bond stuff for 1972.

10 **CSI MIAMI** HUMMER H2

Lieutenant Cane recoiled in horror as his hand brushed against its hard skin. In all his years picking over the remains of decomposed bodies he'd never come across anything so repulsive as the dashboard in his new Hummer H2. Appropriately, given the show's premise, GM gave the Hummer brand the bullet seven seasons in.

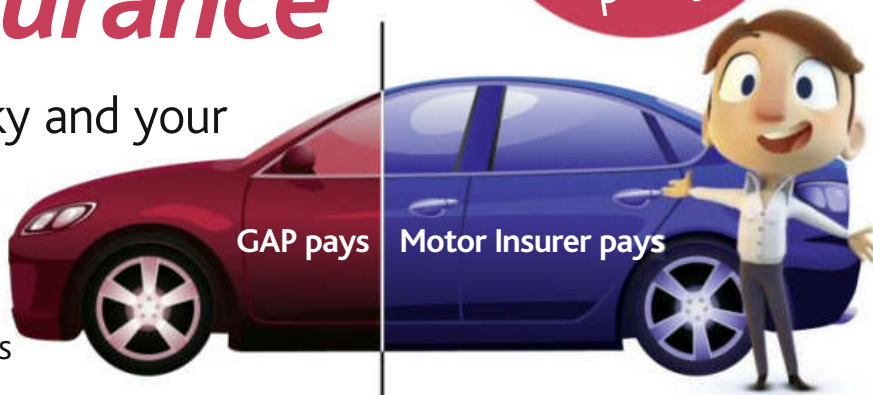


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